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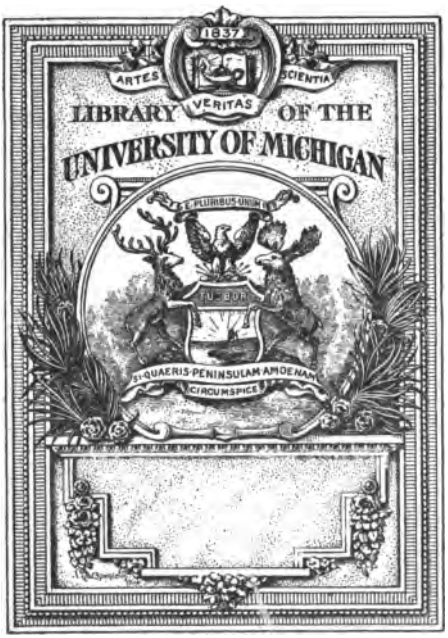
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1834.

WORKS

OF

ROBERT BURNS.

VOL. IV.

Scots wha hae wi Wallace bled.

GLASGOW.
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1835.

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THE

WORKS

OF

ROBERT BURNS.

EDITED BY

THE ETTRICK SHEPHERD,

AND

WILLIAM MOTHERWELL, ESQ.

VOL. IV.

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1841.

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GENERAL CORRESPONDENCE.

No. LII.

TO MRS DUNLOP.

EDINBURGH, 15*th April*, 1787.

MADAM,

THERE is an affectation of gratitude which I dislike. The periods of Johnson and the pauses of Sterne may hide a selfish heart. For my part, Madam, I trust I have too much pride for servility, and too little prudence for selfishness. I have this moment broken open your letter, but

> "Rude am I in speech,
> And therefore little can I grace my cause
> In speaking for myself—"

so I shall not trouble you with any fine speeches and hunted figures. I shall just lay my hand on my heart and say, I hope I shall ever have the truest, the warmest sense of your goodness.

I come abroad, in print, for certain on Wednesday. Your orders I shall punctually attend to; only, by the way I must tell you that I was paid before for Dr Moore's and Miss Williams' copies, through the medium of Commissioner Cochrane in this place, but that we can settle when I have the honour of waiting on you.

Dr Smith* was just gone to London the morning before I received your letter to him. R. B.

* Adam Smith, the celebrated author of the "Wealth of Nations," &c.

No. LIII.

TO DR MOORE.*

EDINBURGH, 23*d April*, 1787.

I RECEIVED the books, and sent the one you mentioned to Mrs Dunlop. I am ill skilled in beating the coverts of imagination for metaphors of gratitude. I thank you, Sir, for

* To the above, Dr Moore returned the following answer, which, as containing his strictures on the Poet's new edition of his works and hints for his future exertions, is of considerable interest.

"CLIFFORD-STREET, *May* 23, 1787.

"DEAR SIR,

"I had the pleasure of your letter by Mr Creech, and soon after he sent me the new edition of your poems. You seem to think it incumbent on you to send to each subscriber a number of copies proportionate to his subscription money, but you may depend upon it, few subscribers expect more than one copy, whatever they subscribed; I must inform you however that I took twelve copies for those subscribers, for whose money you were so accurate as to send me a receipt, and Lord Eglinton told me he had sent for six copies for himself, as he wished to give five of them as presents.

"Some of the poems you have added in this last edition are very beautiful, particularly the 'Winter Night,' the 'Address to Edinburgh,' 'Green grow the rashes,' and the two songs immediately following; the latter of which is exquisite. By the way, I imagine you have a peculiar talent for such compositions, which you ought to indulge. No kind of poetry demands more delicacy or higher polishing. Horace is more admired on account of his Odes than all his other writings. But nothing now added is equal to your 'Vision,' and 'Cotter's Saturday Night.' In these are united fine imagery, natural and pathetic description, with sublimity of language and thought. It is evident that you already possess a great variety of expression and command of the English language; you ought therefore to deal more sparingly, for the future, in the provincial dialect—why should you, by using that, limit the number of your admirers to those who understand the Scottish, when you can extend it to all persons of taste who understand the English language? In my opinion, you should plan some larger work than any you have as yet attempted. I mean, reflect upon some proper subject, and arrange the plan in your mind, without beginning to execute any part of it till you have studied most of the best English poets, and read a little

the honour you have done me ; and to my latest hour will warmly remember it. To be highly pleased with your book, is what I have in common with the world ; but to regard these volumes as a mark of the author's friendly esteem, is a still more supreme gratification.

I leave Edinburgh in the course of ten days or a fort-

more of history.—The Greek and Roman stories you can read in some abridgment, and soon become master of the most brilliant facts, which must highly delight a poetical mind. You should also, and very soon may, become master of the heathen mythology, to which there are everlasting allusions in all the poets, and which in itself is charmingly fanciful. What will require to be studied with more attention, is modern history ; that is, the history of France and great Britain, from the beginning of Henry the Seventh's reign. I know very well you have a mind capable of attaining knowledge by a shorter process than is commonly used, and I am certain you are capable of making a better use of it, when attained, than is generally done.

"I beg you will not give yourself the trouble of writing to me when it is inconvenient, and make no apology when you do write for having postponed it—be assured of this, however, that I shall always be happy to hear from you. I think my friend Mr ——— told me that you had some poems in manuscript by you, of a satirical and humorous nature, (in which, by the way, I think you very strong,) which your prudent friends prevailed on you to omit ; particularly one called 'Somebody's Confession ;' if you will intrust me with a sight of any of these, I will pawn my word to give no copies, and will be obliged to you for a perusal of them.

"I understand you intend to take a farm, and make the useful and respectable business of husbandry your chief occupation : this I hope will not prevent your making occasional addresses to the nine ladies who have shown you such favour, one of whom visited you in the "auld clay biggin." Virgil, before you, proved to the world that there is nothing in the business of husbandry inimical to poetry ; and I sincerely hope that you may afford an example of a good poet being a successful farmer. I fear it will not be in my power to visit Scotland this season ; when I do, I'll endeavour to find you out, for I heartily wish to see and converse with you. If ever your occasions call you to this place, I make no doubt of your paying me a visit, and you may depend on a very cordial welcome from this family.

"I am, dear Sir,

"Your friend and obedient servant,

"J. MOORE."

night, and, after a few pilgrimages over some of the classic ground of Caledonia, Cowden Knowes, Banks of Yarrow, Tweed, &c., I shall return to my rural shades, in all likelihood never more to quit them. I have formed my intimacies and friendships here, but I am afraid they are all of too tender a construction to bear carriage a hundred and fifty miles. To the rich, the great, the fashionable, the polite, I have no equivalent to offer; and I am afraid my meteor appearance will by no means entitle me to a settled correspondence with any of you, who are the permanent lights of genius and literature.

My most respectful compliments to Miss Williams. If once this tangent flight of mine were over, and I were returned to my wonted leisurely motion in my old circle, I may probably endeavour to return her poetic compliment in kind.

R. B.

No. LIV.

TO MRS DUNLOP.

EDINBURGH, *30th April*, 1787.

———YOUR criticisms, Madam, I understand very well, and could have wished to have pleased you better. You are right in your guess that I am not very amenable to counsel. Poets, much my superiors, have so flattered those who possessed the adventitious qualities of wealth and power, that I am determined to flatter no created being, either in prose or verse.

I set as little by princes, lords, clergy, critics, &c. as all these respective gentry do by my bardship. I know what I may expect from the world, by and bye—illiberal abuse, and perhaps contemptuous neglect.

I am happy, Madam, that some of my own favourite pieces are distinguished by your particular approbation.

For my 'Dream,' which has unfortunately incurred your loyal displeasure, I hope in four weeks, or less, to have the honour of appearing, at Dunlop, in its defence in person.

R. B.

No. LV.

TO THE REV. DR HUGH BLAIR.*

LAWN-MARKET, EDINBURGH, *3d May*, 1787.

REVEREND AND MUCH-RESPECTED SIR,

I LEAVE Edinburgh to-morrow morning, but could not go without troubling you with half a line, sincerely to thank you for the kindness, patronage, and friendship you have shown me. I often felt the embarrassment of my

* "We subjoin Dr Blair's answer to the above epistle:—

"ARGYLE-SQUARE, EDINBURGH, *4th May*, 1787.

"DEAR SIR,—I was favoured this forenoon with your very obliging letter, together with an impression of your portrait, for which I return you my best thanks. The success you have met with I do not think was beyond your merits; and if I have had any small hand in contributing to it, it gives me great pleasure. I know no way in which literary persons who are advanced in years can do more service to the world, than in forwarding the efforts of rising genius, or bringing forth unknown merit from obscurity. I was the first person who brought out to the notice of the world the poems of Ossian; first, by the 'Fragments of ancient Poetry,' which I published, and afterwards, by my setting on foot the undertaking for collecting and publishing the 'Works of Ossian;' and I have always considered this as a meritorious action of my life.

"Your situation, as you say, was indeed very singular: and in being brought out, all at once, from the shades of deepest privacy to so great a share of public notice and observation, you had to stand a severe trial. I am happy that you have stood it so well; and, as far as I have known or heard, though in the midst of many temptations, without reproach to your character and behaviour.

"You are now I presume to retire to a more private walk of life; and I trust will conduct yourself there with industry, pru-

singular situation; drawn forth from the veriest shades of life to the glare of remark; and honoured by the notice of those illustrious names of my country whose works, while they are applauded to the end of time, will ever instruct and mend the heart. However the meteor-like novelty of my appearance in the world might attract notice, and honour me with the acquaintance of the permanent lights of

dence, and honour. You have laid the foundation for just public esteem. In the midst of those employments which your situation will render proper, you will not I hope neglect to promote that esteem, by cultivating your genius, and attending to such productions of it as may raise your character still higher. At the same time be not in too great a haste to come forward. Take time and leisure to improve and mature your talents. For on any second production you give the world, your fate, as a poet, will very much depend. There is no doubt a gloss of novelty, which time wears off. As you very properly hint yourself, you are not to be surprised, if in your rural retreat you do not find yourself surrounded with that glare of notice and applause which here shone upon you. No man can be a good poet without being somewhat of a philosopher. He must lay his account, that any one, who exposes himself to public observation, will occasionally meet with the attacks of illiberal censure, which it is always best to overlook and despise. He will be inclined sometimes to court retreat, and to disappear from public view. He will not affect to shine always; that he may at proper seasons come forth with more advantage and energy. He will not think himself neglected if he be not always praised. I have taken the liberty you see of an old man to give advice and make reflections, which your own good sense will I dare say render unncessary.

"As you mention your being just about to leave town, you are going, I should suppose, to Dumfries-shire, to look at some of Mr Miller's farms. I heartily wish the offers to be made you there may answer; as I am persuaded you will not easily find a more generous and better hearted proprietor to live under than Mr Miller. When you return, if you come this way, I will be happy to see you, and to know concerning your future plans of life. You will find me by the 22d of this month, not in my house in Argyle-square, but at a country-house at Restalrig, about a mile east from Edinburgh, near the Musselburgh road. Wishing you all success and prosperity, I am, with real regard and esteem,

"Dear Sir,

"Yours sincerely,

"HUGH BLAIR."

genius and literature, those who are truly benefactors of the immortal nature of man, I knew very well that my utmost merit was far unequal to the task of preserving that character when once the novelty was over; I have made up my mind that abuse, or almost even neglect, will not surprise me in my quarters.

I have sent you a proof impression of Beugo's work* for me, done on Indian paper, as a trifling but sincere testimony with what heart-warm gratitude I am, &c.

R. B.

No. LVI.

TO JAMES JOHNSON,†

EDITOR OF THE SCOTS MUSICAL MUSEUM.

LAWN-MARKET, *Friday-noon, 3d May,* 1787.

DEAR SIR,

I HAVE sent you a song never before known, for your collection; the air by Mr Gibbon, but I know not the author of the words, as I got it from Dr Blacklock.

Farewell, my dear Sir! I wished to have seen you, but I have been dreadfully throng, as I march to-morrow.—Had my acquaintance with you been a little older, I would have asked the favour of your correspondence; as I have met with few people whose company and conversation gave me so much pleasure, because I have met with few whose sentiments are so congenial to my own.

When Dunbar and you meet, tell him that I left Edinburgh with the idea of him hanging somewhere about my heart.

* The portrait of the Poet after Nasmyth.

† This letter is for the first time published, and we are indebted for it to our friend, James Smith, Esq. of Jordan-hill. We have no means of ascertaining the song which it inclosed.—M.

Keep the original of this song till we meet again, whenever that may be.

R. B.

No. LVII.

TO WILLIAM CREECH, ESQ. EDINBURGH.

SELKIRK, 18*th May*, 1787.

MY HONOURED FRIEND,

THE enclosed I have just wrote, nearly extempore, in a solitary inn in Selkirk, after a miserable wet day's riding. I have been over most of East Lothian, Berwick, Roxburgh, and Selkirk-shires; and next week I begin a tour through the north of England. Yesterday I dined with Lady Harriet, sister to my noble patron,* *Quem Deus conservet!* I would write till I would tire you as much with dull prose, as I daresay by this time you are with wretched verse, but I am jaded to death; so, with a grateful farewell,

I have the honour to be,
Good Sir, yours sincerely,
R. B.

Auld chuckie Reekie's† sair distrest,
Down droops her ance weel burnish'd crest,
Nae joy her bonnie buskit nest
Can yield ava;
Her darling bird that she lo'es best,
Willie's awa,‡

* James, Earl of Glencairn. † Edinburgh. ‡ See vol. I. p. 222.

No. LVIII.

TO MR PATISON, BOOKSELLER, PAISLEY.*

BERRY-WELL, NEAR DUNSE, *May 17th*, 1787.

DEAR SIR,

I AM sorry I was out of Edinburgh, making a slight pilgrimage to the classic scenes of this country, when I was favoured with yours of the 11th instant, inclosing an order of the Paisley banking company on the Royal bank, for twenty-two pounds seven shillings sterling, payment in full, after carriage deducted, for ninety copies of my book I sent you. According to your motions, I see you will have left Scotland before this reaches you, otherwise I would send you 'Holy Willie' with all my heart.—I was so hurried that I absolutely forgot several things I ought to have minded, among the rest sending books to Mr Cowan, but any order of yours will be answered at Creech's shop. You will please remember that non-subscribers pay six shillings, this is Creech's profit; but those who have subscribed, though their names have been neglected in the printed list, which is very incorrect, they are supplied at the subscription price. I was not at Glasgow, nor do I intend for London; and I think Mrs Fame is very idle to tell so many lies on a poor Poet. When you or Mr Cowan write for copies, if you should want any, direct to Mr Hill at Mr Creech's shop, and I write to Mr Hill by this post, to answer either of your orders. Hill is Mr Creech's first clerk, and Creech himself is presently in London. I suppose I shall have the pleasure against your return to Paisley, of assuring you how much I am,

Dear Sir,
Your obliged humble servant,
R. B.

* This letter has never before been published, and it is valuable inasmuch as it shows the number of the Poet's works which

No. LIX.

TO MR W. NICOL,*

MASTER OF THE HIGH SCHOOL, EDINBURGH.

CARLISLE, *June* 1, 1787.

KIND HONEST-HEARTED WILLIE,

I'M sitten down here, after seven and forty miles ridin', e'en as forjesket and forniaw'd as a forfoughten cock, to gie you some notion o' my land lowper-like stravaguin sin the sorrowfu' hour that I sheuk hands and parted wi' auld Reekie.

My auld, ga'd gleyde o' a meere has huchyall'd up hill and down brae, in Scotland and England, as teugh and birnie as a very devil wi' me.† It's true, she's as poor's a sangmaker and as hard's a kirk, and tipper-taipers when she taks the gate, first like a lady's gentlewoman in a minuwae, or a hen on a het girdle; but she's a yauld, poutherie Girran for a' that, and has a stomack like Willie Stalker's meere that wad hae disgeested tumbler-wheels, for she'll whip me aff her five stimparts o' the best aits at a downsittin and ne'er fash her thumb. When ance her ringbanes and spavies, her crucks and cramps, are fairly soupl'd, she beets to, beets to, and aye the hindmost hour the tightest. I could wager her price to a thretty pennies, that for twa

were subscribed for in Paisley. Our thanks are due to our friend Charles Hutcheson, Esq. Glasgow, for placing the original MS. in our hands.—M.

* In reviewing Mr Cromek's Reliques of Burns, in which publication this curious epistle first saw the light, Sir Walter Scott says —"No man ever had more command of the ancient Doric dialect than Burns. He has left a curious testimony of his skill in a letter to Mr Nicol in this volume; an attempt to read a sentence of which would break the teeth of most modern Scotchmen." It is written in the west country dialect, and does not present any difficulty to a native.—M.

† This mare was the Poet's favourite, Jenny Geddes.

or three wooks ridin at fifty mile a day, the deil-sticket a five gallopers acqueesh Clyde and Whithorn could cast saut on her tail.

I hae dander'd owre a' the kintra frae Dumbar to Selcraig, and hae forgather'd wi' mony a guid fallow, and mony a weelfar'd hizzie. I met wi' twa dink quines in particlar, ane o' them a sonsie, fine, fodgel lass, baith braw and bonnie; the tither was a clean-shankit, straught, tight, weelfar'd winch, as blythe's a lintwhite on a flowerie thorn, and as sweet and modest's a new blawn plumrose in a hazle shaw. They were baith bred to mainers by the beuk, and onie ane o' them had as muckle smeddum and rumblegumtion as the half o' some presbytries that you and I baith ken. They play'd me sik a deevil o' a shavie that I daur say if my harigals were turn'd out, ye wad see twa nicks i'the heart o' me like the mark o' a kail-whittle in a castock.

I was gaun to write you a lang pystle, but, Gude forgie me, I gat mysel sae noutouriously bitchify'd the day after kail-time that I can hardly stoiter but and ben.

My best respecks to the guidwife and a' our common friens, especiall Mr and Mrs Cruikshank, and the honest guidman o' Jock's Lodge.

I'll be in Dumfries the morn gif the beast be to the fore, and the branks bide hale.

Gude be wi' you, Willie! Amen!

R. B.

No. LX.

TO THE SAME.

MAUCHLINE, *June* 18, 1787.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I AM now arrived safe in my native country, after a very agreeable jaunt, and have the pleasure to find all my friends

well. I breakfasted with your gray-headed, reverend friend, Mr Smith; and was highly pleased both with the cordial welcome he gave me, and his most excellent appearance and sterling good sense.

I have been with Mr Miller at Dalswinton, and am to meet him again in August. From my view of the lands, and his reception of my bardship, my hopes in that business are rather mended; but still they are but slender.

I am quite charmed with Dumfries folks—Mr Burnside, the clergyman, in particular, is a man whom I shall ever gratefully remember; and his wife, Gude forgie me! I had almost broke the tenth commandment on her account. Simplicity, elegance, good sense, sweetness of disposition, good humour, kind hospitality, are the constituents of her manner and heart: in short—but if I say one word more about her, I shall be directly in love with her.

I never, my friend, thought mankind very capable of anything generous; but the stateliness of the patricians in Edinburgh, and the servility of my plebeian brethren (who perhaps formerly eyed me askance) since I returned home, have nearly put me out of conceit altogether with my species. I have bought a pocket Milton which I carry perpetually about with me, in order to study the sentiments—the dauntless magnanimity, the intrepid, unyielding independence, the desperate daring, and noble defiance of hardship in that great personage, SATAN. 'Tis true, I have just now a little cash; but I am afraid the star that hitherto has shed its malignant, purpose-blasting rays full in my zenith; that noxious planet, so baneful in its influences to the rhyming tribe, I much dread it is not yet beneath my horizon.—Misfortune dodges the path of human life; the poetic mind finds itself miserably deranged in, and unfit for the walks of business; add to all, that thoughtless follies and hare-brained whims, like so many *ignes fatui*, eternally diverging from the right line of sober discretion, sparkle with step-bewitching blaze in the idly-gazing eyes of the poor heedless Bard, till, pop, "he falls like Lucifer, never

to hope again." God grant this may be an unreal picture with respect to me! but should it not, I have very little dependence on mankind. I will close my letter with this tribute my heart bids me pay you—the many ties of acquaintance and friendship which I have, or think I have in life, I have felt along the lines, and, damn them, they are almost all of them of such frail contexture, that I am sure they would not stand the breath of the least adverse breeze of fortune; but from you, my ever dear Sir, I look with confidence for the Apostolic love that shall wait on me "through good report and bad report"—the love which Solomon emphatically says "is strong as death." My compliments to Mrs Nicol, and all the circle of our common friends,

P.S. I shall be in Edinburgh about the latter end of July.

R. B.

No. LXI.

TO MR JAMES CANDLISH.

EDINBURGH, 1787.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

IF once I were gone from this scene of hurry and dissipation, I promise myself the pleasure of that correspondence being renewed which has been so long broken. At present I have time for nothing. Dissipation and business engross every moment. I am engaged in assisting an honest Scotch enthusiast,* a friend of mine, who is an engraver, and has taken it into his head to publish a collection of all our songs set to music, of which the words and music are done by Scotsmen. This, you will easily guess, is an undertaking exactly to my taste. I have collected,

* Johnson, the publisher and proprietor of the Musical Museum.

begged, borrowed, and stolen, all the songs I could meet with. Pompey's Ghost, words and music, I beg from you immediately, to go into his second number: the first is already published. I shall show you the first number when I see you in Glasgow, which will be in a fortnight or less. Do be so kind as to send me the song in a day or two: you cannot imagine how much it will oblige me.

Direct to me at Mr W. Cruikshank's, St James's Square, New Town, Edinburgh.

R. B.

No. LXII.

TO ROBERT AINSLIE, ESQ.

ARRACHAR, 28*th June*, 1787.

MY DEAR SIR,

I write this on my tour through a country where savage streams tumble over savage mountains, thinly overspread with savage flocks, which sparingly support as savage inhabitants. My last stage was Inverary—to-morrow night's stage Dumbarton. I ought sooner to have answered your kind letter, but you know I am a man of many sins.

R. B.

No. LXIII.

TO WILLIAM NICOL, ESQ.

AUCHTERTYRE, *Monday, June*, 1787.

MY DEAR SIR,

I FIND myself very comfortable here, neither oppressed by ceremony, nor mortified by neglect. Lady Augusta is a most engaging woman, and very happy in her family, which makes one's outgoings and incomings very agreeable.

I called at Mr Ramsay's of Auchtertyre as I came up the country, and am so delighted with him that I shall certainly accept of his invitation to spend a day or two with him as I return. I leave this place on Wednesday or Thursday.

Make my kind compliments to Mr and Mrs Cruikshank and Mrs Nicol, if she is returned.

I am ever, dear Sir,

Your deeply indebted,—R. B.

No. LXIV.

TO WILLIAM CRUIKSHANK,*

ST JAMES'S SQUARE, EDINBURGH.

AUCHTERTYRE, *Monday, June,* 1787.

I HAVE nothing, my dear Sir, to write to you, but that I feel myself exceedingly comfortably situated in this good family: just notice enough to make me easy but not to embarrass me. I was storm-staid two days at the foot of the Ochill-hills, with Mr Tait of Herveyston and Mr Johnston of Alva, but was so well pleased that I shall certainly spend a day on the banks of the Devon as I return. I leave this place I suppose on Wednesday, and shall devote a day to Mr Ramsay at Auchtertyre, near Stirling: a man to whose worth I cannot do justice. My respectful kind compliments to Mrs Cruikshank, and my dear little Jeanie, and if you see Mr Masterton, please remember me to him.

I am ever,

My dear Sir, &c.—R. B.

* The gentleman to whom this letter is addressed was one of the masters of the High school of Edinburgh.—M.

No. LXV.

TO MR JAMES SMITH,

LINLITHGOW.

June 30th, 1787.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

ON our return, at a Highland gentleman's hospitable mansion, we fell in with a merry party, and danced till the ladies left us, at three in the morning. Our dancing was none of the French or English insipid formal movements; the ladies sung Scotch songs like angels, at intervals; then we flew at Bab at the Bowster, Tullochgorum, Loch Erroch Side,* &c. like midges sporting in the mottie sun, or craws prognosticating a storm in a hairst day.—When the dear lasses left us, we ranged round the bowl till the good-fellow hour of six; except a few minutes that we went out to pay our devotions to the glorious lamp of day peering over the towering top of Benlomond. We all kneeled; our worthy landlord's son held the bowl; each man a full glass in his hand; and I, as priest, repeated some rhyming nonsense, like Thomas-a-Rhymer's prophecies I suppose. —After a small refreshment of the gifts of Somnus, we proceeded to spend the day on Lochlomond, and reached Dumbarton in the evening. We dined at another good fellow's house, and, consequently, pushed the bottle; when we went out to mount our horses, we found ourselves "No vera fou but gaylie yet." My two friends and I rode soberly down the Loch side, till by came a Highlandman at the gallop, on a tolerably good horse, but which had never known the ornaments of iron or leather. We scorned to be out-galloped by a Highlandman, so off we started, whip and spur. My companions, though seemingly gaily mounted, fell sadly astern; but my old mare, Jenny Geddes, one of the Rosinante family, she strained past the Highlandman

* Scotch tunes.

in spite of all his efforts with the hair halter : just as I was passing him, Donald wheeled his horse, as if to cross before me to mar my progress, when down came his horse, and threw his rider's breekless a—e in a clipt hedge : and down came Jenny Geddes over all, and my bardship between her and the Highlandman's horse. Jenny Geddes trode over me with such cautious reverence, that matters were not so bad as might well have been expected ; so I came off with a few cuts and bruises, and a thorough resolution to be a pattern of sobriety for the future.

I have yet fixed on nothing with respect to the serious business of life. I am, just as usual, a rhyming, mason-making, raking, aimless, idle fellow. However, I shall somewhere have a farm soon. I was going to say, a wife too ; but that must never be my blessed lot. I am but a younger son of the house of Parnassus, and like other younger sons of great families, I may intrigue, if I choose to run all risks, but must not marry.

I am afraid I have almost ruined one source, the principal one indeed, of my former happiness ; that eternal propensity I always had to fall in love. My heart no more glows with feverish rapture. I have no paradisaical evening interviews, stolen from the restless cares and prying inhabitants of this weary world. I have only ———. This last is one of your distant acquaintances, has a fine figure, and elegant manners ; and in the train of some great folks whom you know, has seen the politest quarters in Europe. I do like her a deal ; but what piques me is her conduct at the commencement of our acquaintance. I frequently visited her when I was in ———, and after passing regularly the intermediate degrees between the distant formal bow and the familiar grasp round the waist, I ventured, in my careless way, to talk of friendship in rather ambiguous terms ; and after her return to ———, I wrote to her in the same style. Miss, construing my words farther I suppose than even I intended, flew off in a tangent of female dignity and reserve, like a mounting lark in an April morning ; and

wrote me an answer which measured me out very completely what an immense way I had to travel before I could reach the climate of her favour. But I am an old hawk at the sport, and wrote her such a cool, deliberate, prudent reply, as brought my bird from her aerial towerings, pop down at my foot, like Corporal Trim's hat.

As for the rest of my acts, and my wars, and all my wise sayings, and why my mare was called Jenny Geddes, they shall be recorded in a few weeks hence at Linlithgow, in the chronicles of your memory, by R. B.

No. LXVI.

TO MR JOHN RICHMOND.

MOSSGIEL, *7th July*, 1787.

MY DEAR RICHMOND,

I AM all impatience to hear of your fate since the old confounder of right and wrong has turned you out of place, by his journey to answer his indictment at the bar of the other world. He will find the practice of the court so different from the practice in which he has for so many years been thoroughly hackneyed, that his friends, if he had any connections truly of that kind, which I rather doubt, may well tremble for his sake. His chicane, his left-handed wisdom, which stood so firmly by him, to such good purpose, here, like other accomplices in robbery and plunder, will, now the piratical business is blown, in all probability turn king's evidences, and then the devil's bagpiper will touch him off "Bundle and go!"

If he has left you any legacy, I beg your pardon for all this; if not, I know you will swear to every word I said about him.

I have lately been rambling over by Dumbarton and Inverary, and running a drunken race on the side of Loch Lomond with a wild Highlandman; his horse, which had

never known the ornaments of iron or leather, zigzagged across before my old spavin'd hunter, whose name is Jenny Geddes, and down came the Highlandman, horse and all, and down came Jenny and my bardship ; so I have got such a skinful of bruises and wounds, that I shall be at least four weeks before I dare venture on my journey to Edinburgh.

Not one new thing under the sun has happened in Mauchline since you left it. I hope this will find you as comfortably situated as formerly, or, if heaven pleases, more so ; but, at all events, I trust you will let me know of course how matters stand with you, well or ill. 'Tis but poor consolation to tell the world when matters go wrong; but you know very well your connection and mine stands on a different footing.

I am ever, my dear friend, yours,

R. B.

No. LXVII.

TO ROBERT AINSLIE.

MAUCHLINE, 23*d July*, 1787.

MY DEAR AINSLIE,

THERE is one thing for which I set great store by you as a friend, and it is this, that I have not a friend upon earth, besides yourself, to whom I can talk nonsense without forfeiting some degree of his esteem. Now, to one like me, who never cares for speaking any thing else but nonsense, such a friend as you is an invaluable treasure. I was never a rogue, but have been a fool all my life ; and, in spite of all my endeavours, I see now plainly that I shall never be wise. Now it rejoices my heart to have met with such a fellow as you, who, though you are not just such a hopeless fool as I, yet I trust you will never listen so much to the temptations of the devil as to grow so very wise that you will in the least disrespect an honest fellow because he

is a fool. In short, I have set you down as the staff of my old age, when the whole list of my friends will, after a decent share of pity, have forgot me.

"Though in the morn comes sturt and strife,
Yet joy may come at noon;
And I hope to live a merry merry life
When a' thir days are done."

Write me soon, were it but a few lines just to tell me how that good sagacious man your father is,—that kind dainty body your mother,—that strapping chiel your brother Douglas—and my friend Rachel, who is as far before Rachel of old, as she was before her blear-eyed sister Leah.

R. B.

No. LXVIII.

TO DR MOORE.

MAUCHLINE, 2*d August*, 1787.

SIR,

FOR some months past I have been rambling over the country, but I am now confined with some lingering complaints, originating, as I take it, in the stomach. To divert my spirits a little in this miserable fog of ennui, I have taken a whim to give you a history of myself. My name has made some little noise in this country; you have done me the honour to interest yourself very warmly in my behalf; and I think a faithful account of what character of a man I am, and how I came by that character, may perhaps amuse you in an idle moment. I will give you an honest narrative, though I know it will be often at my own expense; for I assure you, Sir, I have, like Solomon, whose character, excepting in the trifling affair of wisdom, I sometimes think I resemble,—I have, I say, like him turned my eyes to behold madness and folly, and like him, too, frequently shaken

hands with their intoxicating friendship. After you have perused these pages, should you think them trifling and impertinent, I only beg leave to tell you, that the poor author wrote them under some twitching qualms of conscience, arising from a suspicion that he was doing what he ought not to do: a predicament he has more than once been in before.

I have not the most distant pretensions to assume that character which the pye-coated guardians of escutcheons call a gentleman. When at Edinburgh last winter, I got acquainted in the herald's office; and, looking through that granary of honours, I there found almost every name in the kingdom; but for me,

"My ancient but ignoble blood
Has crept thro' scoundrels ever since the flood."

Gules, purpure, argent, &c. quite disowned me.

My father was in the north of Scotland, the son of a farmer, and was thrown by early misfortunes on the world at large; where, after many years' wanderings and sojournings, he picked up a pretty large quantity of observation and experience, to which I am indebted for most of my little pretensions to wisdom. I have met with few who understood men, their manners, and their ways, equal to him; but stubborn, ungainly integrity, and headlong, ungovernable irascibility, are disqualifying circumstances; consequently, I was born a very poor man's son. For the first six or seven years of my life, my father was gardener to a worthy gentleman of small estate in the neighbourhood of Ayr. Had he continued in that station, I must have marched off to be one of the little underlings about a farm house; but it was his dearest wish and prayer to have it in his power to keep his children under his own eye, till they could discern between good and evil; so, with the assistance of his generous master, my father ventured on a small farm on his estate. At those years, I was by no means a favourite with any body. I was a good deal noted for a retentive memory, a stubborn sturdy something in my disposition,

and an enthusiastic idiot* piety. I say idiot piety, because I was then but a child. Though it cost the schoolmaster some thrashings, I made an excellent English scholar; and by the time I was ten or eleven years of age, I was a critic in substantives, verbs, and particles. In my infant and boyish days, too, I owed much to an old woman who resided in the family, remarkable for her ignorance, credulity, and superstition. She had, I suppose, the largest collection in the country of tales and songs concerning devils, ghosts, fairies, brownies, witches, warlocks, spunkies, kelpies, elf-candles, dead-lights, wraiths, apparitions, cantraips, giants, enchanted towers, dragons and other trumpery. This cultivated the latent seeds of poetry; but had so strong an effect on my imagination, that to this hour, in my nocturnal rambles, I sometimes keep a sharp look out in suspicious places; and though nobody can be more sceptical than I am in such matters, yet it often takes an effort of philosophy to shake off these idle terrors. The earliest composition that I recollect taking pleasure in, was The Vision of Mirza, and a hymn of Addison's beginning, "How are thy servants blest, O Lord!" I particularly remember one half-stanza which was music to my boyish ear—

> "For though on dreadful whirls we hung
> High on the broken wave—"

I met with these pieces in Mason's English Collection, one of my school-books. The first two books I ever read in private, and which gave me more pleasure than any two books I ever read since, were the Life of Hannibal, and the History of Sir William Wallace. Hannibal gave my young ideas such a turn, that I used to strut in raptures up and down after the recruiting drum and bag-pipe, and wish myself tall enough to be a soldier; while the story of Wallace poured a Scottish prejudice into my veins, which will boil along there till the flood-gates of life shut in eternal rest.

* Idiot for idiotic.

Polemical divinity about this time was putting the country half mad, and I, ambitious of shining in conversation parties on Sundays, between sermons, at funerals, &c., used a few years afterwards to puzzle Calvinism with so much heat and indiscretion, that I raised a hue and cry of heresy against me, which has not ceased to this hour.

My vicinity to Ayr was of some advantage to me. My social disposition, when not checked by some modifications of spiritual pride, was like our catechism definition of infinitude, without bounds or limits. I formed several connexions with other younkers, who possessed superior advantages; the youngling actors who were busy in the rehearsal of parts, in which they were shortly to appear on the stage of life, where, alas! I was destined to drudge behind the scenes. It is not commonly at this green age, that our young gentry have a just sense of the immense distance between them and their ragged play-fellows. It takes a few dashes into the world, to give the young great man that proper, decent, unnoticing disregard for the poor, insignificant, stupid devils, the mechanics and peasantry around him, who were, perhaps, born in the same village. My young superiors never insulted the clouterly appearance of my plough-boy carcase, the two extremes of which were often exposed to all the inclemencies of all the seasons. They would give me stray volumes of books; among them, even then, I could pick up some observations; and one, whose heart, I am sure, not even the "Munny Begum" scenes have tainted, helped me to a little French. Parting with these my young friends and benefactors, as they occasionally went off for the East or West Indies, was often to me a sore affliction; but I was soon called to more serious evils. My father's generous master died; the farm proved a ruinous bargain; and to clench the misfortune, we fell into the hands of a factor, who sat for the picture I have drawn of one in my tale of 'Twa Dogs.' My father was advanced in life when he married; I was the eldest of seven children, and he, worn out by early hardships, was

unfit for labour. My father's spirit was soon irritated, but not easily broken. There was a freedom in his lease in two years more, and to weather these two years, we retrenched our expenses. We lived very poorly: I was a dexterous ploughman for my age; and the next eldest to me was a brother (Gilbert), who could drive the plough very well, and help me to thrash the corn. A novel-writer might, perhaps, have viewed these scenes with some satisfaction, but so did not I; my indignation yet boils at the recollection of the scoundrel factor's insolent threatening letters, which used to set us all in tears.

This kind of life—the cheerless gloom of a hermit, with the unceasing moil of a galley-slave, brought me to my sixteenth year; a little before which period I first committed the sin of rhyme. You know our country custom of coupling a man and woman together as partners in the labours of harvest. In my fifteenth autumn, my partner was a bewitching creature, a year younger than myself. My scarcity of English denies me the power of doing her justice in that language, but you know the Scottish idiom: she was a "bonnie, sweet, sonsie lass." In short, she, altogether unwittingly to herself, initiated me in that delicious passion, which, in spite of acid disappointment, gin-horse prudence, and book-worm philosophy, I hold to be the first of human joys, our dearest blessing here below! How she caught the contagion I cannot tell; you medical people talk much of infection from breathing the same air, the touch, &c.; but I never expressly said I loved her.—Indeed, I did not know myself why I liked so much to loiter behind with her, when returning in the evening from our labours; why the tones of her voice made my heart-strings thrill like an Æolian harp; and particularly why my pulse beat such a furious ratan, when I looked and fingered over her little hand to pick out the cruel nettle-stings and thistles. Among her other love-inspiring qualities, she sung sweetly; and it was her favourite reel to which I attempted giving an embodied vehicle in rhyme. I was not so presumptuous as to

imagine that I could make verses like printed ones, composed by men who had Greek and Latin ; but my girl sung a song which was said to be composed by a small country laird's son, on one of his father's maids, with whom he was in love ; and I saw no reason why I might not rhyme as well as he ; for, excepting that he could smear sheep, and cast peats, his father living in the moorlands, he had no more scholar-craft than myself.

Thus with me began love and poetry ; which at times have been my only, and till within the last twelve months, nave been my highest enjoyment. My father struggled on till he reached the freedom in his lease, when he entered on a larger farm, about ten miles farther in the country. The nature of the bargain he made was such as to throw a little ready money into his hands at the commencement of his lease, otherwise the affair would have been impracticable. For four years we lived comfortably here, but a difference commencing between him and his landlord as to terms, after three years tossing and whirling in the vortex of litigation, my father was just saved from the horrors of a jail, by a consumption, which, after two years' promises, kindly stepped in, and carried him away, to where the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary are at rest!

It is during the time that we lived on this farm that my little story is most eventful. I was, at the beginning of this period, perhaps the most ungainly awkward boy in the parish—no *solitaire* was less acquainted with the ways of the world. What I knew of ancient story was gathered from Salmon's and Guthrie's Geographical Grammars ; and the ideas I had formed of modern manners, of literature, and criticism, I got from the Spectator. These, with Pope's Works, some Plays of Shakspeare, Tull and Dickson on Agriculture, The Pantheon, Locke's Essay on the Human Understanding, Stackhouse's History of the Bible, Justice's British Gardener's Directory, Boyle's Lectures, Allan Ramsay's Works, Taylor's Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin, A Select Collection of English Songs, and Hervey's Medi-

tations, had formed the whole of my reading. The collection of songs was my *vade mecum.* I pored over them, driving my cart, or walking to labour, song by song, verse by verse; carefully noting the true tender, or sublime, from affectation and fustian. I am convinced I owe to this practice much of my critic-craft, such as it is.

In my seventeenth year, to give my manners a brush, I went to a country dancing-school. My father had an unaccountable antipathy against these meetings, and my going was, what to this moment I repent, in opposition to his wishes.* My father, as I said before, was subject to strong passions; from that instance of disobedience in me, he took a sort of dislike to me, which, I believe, was one cause of the dissipation which marked my succeeding years. I say dissipation, comparatively with the strictness, and sobriety, and regularity of presbyterian country life; for, though the will-o'-wisp meteors of thoughtless whim were almost the sole lights of my path, yet early ingrained piety and virtue kept me for several years afterwards within the line of innocence. The great misfortune of my life was to want an aim. I had felt early some stirrings of ambition, but they were the blind gropings of Homer's Cyclops round the walls of his cave. I saw my father's situation entailed on me perpetual labour. The only two openings by which I

* "I wonder," says Gilbert Burns, "how Robert could attribute to our father that lasting resentment of his going to a dancing school against his will, and of which he was incapable. I believe the truth was, that about this time he began to see the dangerous impetuosity of my brother's passions, as well as his not being amenable to counsel, which often irritated my father, and which, he would naturally think, a dancing-school was not likely to correct. But he was proud of Robert's genius, which he bestowed more expense on cultivating than on the rest of the family—and he was equally delighted with his warmth of heart and conversational powers. He had indeed that dislike of dancing-schools which Robert mentions; but so far overcame it during Robert's first month of attendance, that he permitted the rest of the family that were fit for it to accompany him during the second month. Robert excelled in dancing, and was for some time distractedly fond of it."—M.

could enter the temple of fortune were the gate of niggardly economy, or the path of little chicaning bargain-making. The first is so contracted an aperture I never could squeeze myself into it—the last I always hated—there was contamination in the very entrance! Thus abandoned of aim or view in life, with a strong appetite for sociability, as well from native hilarity, as from a pride of observation and remark; a constitutional melancholy or hypochondriasm that made me fly solitude; add to these incentives to social life, my reputation for bookish knowledge, a certain wild logical talent, and a strength of thought, something like the rudiments of good sense; and it will not seem surprising that I was generally a welcome guest where I visited, or any great wonder that always, where two or three met together, there was I among them. But far beyond all other impulses of my heart, was *un penchant à l'adorable moitié du genre humain.* My heart was completely tinder, and was eternally lighted up by some goddess or other; and, as in every other warfare in this world, my fortune was various; sometimes I was received with favour, and sometimes I was mortified with a repulse. At the plough, scythe, or reap-hook, I feared no competitor, and thus I set absolute want at defiance; and as I never cared farther for my labours than while I was in actual exercise, I spent the evenings in the way after my own heart. A country lad seldom carries on a love adventure without an assisting confidant. I possessed a curiosity, zeal, and intrepid dexterity that recommended me as a proper second on these occasions; and I dare say, I felt as much pleasure in being in the secret of half the loves of the parish of Tarbolton, as ever did statesman in knowing the intrigues of half the courts of Europe. The very goose-feather in my hand seems to know instinctively the well-worn path of my imagination, the favourite theme of my song; and is with difficulty restrained from giving you a couple of paragraphs on the love-adventures of my compeers, the humble inmates of the farm-house and cottage; but the grave sons of science, ambition, or avarice,

baptize these things by the name of follies. To the sons and daughters of labour and poverty they are matters of the most serious nature: to them the ardent hope, the stolen interview, the tender farewell, are the greatest and most delicious parts of their enjoyments.

Another circumstance in my life which made some alteration in my mind and manners, was, that I spent my nineteenth summer on a smuggling coast, a good distance from home, at a noted school, to learn mensuration, surveying, dialling, &c., in which I made a pretty good progress. But I made a greater progress in the knowledge of mankind. The contraband trade was at that time very successful, and it sometimes happened to me to fall in with those who carried it on. Scenes of swaggering riot and roaring dissipation were, till this time, new to me; but I was no enemy to social life. Here, though I learnt to fill my glass, and to mix without fear in a drunken squabble, yet I went on with a high hand with my geometry, till the sun entered Virgo, a month which is always a carnival in my bosom, when a charming fillette, who lived next door to the school, overset my trigonometry, and set me off at a tangent from the spheres of my studies. I, however, struggled on with my sines and co-sines for a few days more; but stepping into the garden one charming noon to take the sun's altitude, there I met my angel

> "Like Proserpine gathering flowers,
> Herself a fairer flower——"

It was in vain to think of doing any more good at school. The remaining week I staid I did nothing but craze the faculties of my soul about her, or steal out to meet her; and the two last nights of my stay in the country, had sleep been a mortal sin, the image of this modest and innocent girl had kept me guiltless.

I returned home very considerably improved. My reading was enlarged with the very important addition of Thomson's and Shenstone's Works; I had seen human nature in a new phasis; and I engaged several of my

schoolfellows to keep up a literary correspondence with me. This improved me in composition. I had met with a collection of letters by the wits of Queen Anne's reign, and I pored over them most devoutly. I kept copies of any of my own letters that pleased me, and a comparison between them and the composition of most of my correspondents flattered my vanity. I carried this whim so far, that though I had not three-farthings' worth of business in the world, yet almost every post brought me as many letters as if I had been a broad plodding son of the day-book and ledger.

My life flowed on much in the same course till my twenty-third year. *Vive l'amour, et vive la bagatelle,* were my sole principles of action. The addition of two more authors to my library gave me great pleasure; Sterne and Mackenzie—Tristram Shandy and the Man of Feeling were my bosom favourites. Poesy was still a darling walk for my mind, but it was only indulged in according to the humour of the hour. I had usually half a dozen or more pieces on hand; I took up one or other, as it suited the momentary tone of the mind, and dismissed the work as it bordered on fatigue. My passions, when once lighted up, raged like so many devils, till they got vent in rhyme; and then the conning over my verses, like a spell, soothed all into quiet! None of the rhymes of those days are in print, except 'Winter, a dirge,' the eldest of my printed pieces; 'The Death of poor Maillie,' 'John Barleycorn,' and songs first, second, and third. Song second was the ebullition of that passion which ended the forementioned school-business.

My twenty-third year was to me an important era. Partly through whim, and partly that I wished to set about doing something in life, I joined a flax-dresser in a neighbouring town (Irvine), to learn his trade. This was an unlucky affair. My * * * and to finish the whole, as we were giving a welcome carousal to the new year, the shop took fire and burnt to ashes, and I was left, like a true poet, not worth a sixpence.

I was obliged to give up this scheme; the clouds of mis-

fortune were gathering thick round my father's head ; and, what was worst of all, he was visibly far gone in a consumption ; and to crown my distresses, a *belle fille*, whom I adored, and who had pledged her soul to meet me in the field of matrimony, jilted me, with peculiar circumstances of mortification. The finishing evil that brought up the rear of this infernal file, was my constitutional melancholy being increased to such a degree, that for three months I was in a state of mind scarcely to be envied by the hopeless wretches who have got their mittimus—depart from me, ye cursed!

From this adventure I learned something of a town life ; but the principal thing which gave my mind a turn, was a friendship I formed with a young fellow, a very noble character, but a hapless son of misfortune. He was the son of a simple mechanic ; but a great man in the neighbourhood taking him under his patronage, gave him a genteel education, with a view of bettering his situation in life. The patron dying just as he was ready to launch out into the world, the poor fellow in despair went to sea ; where, after a variety of good and ill-fortune, a little before I was acquainted with him he had been set on shore by an American privateer, on the wild coast of Connaught, stripped of every thing. I cannot quit this poor fellow's story without adding, that he is at this time master of a large West-Indiaman belonging to the Thames.

His mind was fraught with independence, magnanimity, and every manly virtue. I loved and admired him to a degree of enthusiasm, and of course strove to imitate him. In some measure I succeeded ; I had pride before, but he taught it to flow in proper channels. His knowledge of the world was vastly superior to mine, and I was all attention to learn. He was the only man I ever saw who was a greater fool than myself where woman was the presiding star ; but he spoke of illicit love with the levity of a sailor, which hitherto I had regarded with horror. Here his friendship did me a mischief, and the consequence was, that

soon after I resumed the plough, I wrote the 'Poet's Welcome.'* My reading only increased while in this town by two stray volumes of Pamela, and one of Ferdinand Count Fathom, which gave me some idea of novels. Rhyme, except some religious pieces that are in print, I had given up; but meeting with Fergusson's Scottish Poems, I strung anew my wildly sounding lyre with emulating vigour. When my father died, his all went among the hell-hounds that prowl in the kennel of justice; but we made a shift to collect a little money in the family amongst us, with which, to keep us together, my brother and I took a neighbouring farm. My brother wanted my hair-brained imagination, as well as my social and amorous madness; but in good sense, and every sober qualification, he was far my superior.

I entered on this farm with a full resolution, "come, go to, I will be wise!" I read farming books, I calculated crops; I attended markets; and, in short, in spite of the devil, and the world, and the flesh, I believe I should have been a wise man; but the first year, from unfortunately buying bad seed, the second from a late harvest, we lost half our crops. This overset all my wisdom, and I returned "like the dog to his vomit, and the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire."

I now began to be known in the neighbourhood as a maker of rhymes. The first of my poetic offspring that saw the light, was a burlesque lamentation on a quarrel between two reverend Calvinists, both of them *dramatis personæ* in my 'Holy Fair.' I had a notion myself that the piece had some merit; but, to prevent the worst, I gave a copy of it to a friend, who was very fond of such things, and told him that I could not guess who was the author of it, but that I thought it pretty clever. With a certain description of the clergy, as well as laity, it met with a roar of applause. 'Holy Willie's Prayer' next made its appear-

* 'Rob the Rhymer's Welcome to his Bastard Child.'

ance, and alarmed the kirk-session so much, that they held several meetings to look over their spiritual artillery, if haply any of it might be pointed against profane rhymers. Unluckily for me, my wanderings led me on another side, within point-blank shot of their heaviest metal. This is the unfortunate story that gave rise to my printed poem, 'The Lament.' This was a most melancholy affair, which I cannot yet bear to reflect on, and had very nearly given me one or two of the principal qualifications for a place among those who have lost the chart, and mistaken the reckoning of rationality. I gave up my part of the farm to my brother; in truth it was only nominally mine; and made what little preparation was in my power for Jamaica. But, before leaving my native country for ever, I resolved to publish my poems. I weighed my productions as impartially as was in my power; I thought they had merit; and it was a delicious idea that I should be called a clever fellow, even though it should never reach my ears—a poor negro-driver—or perhaps a victim to that inhospitable clime, and gone to the world of spirits! I can truly say, that, *pauvre inconnu* as I then was, I had pretty nearly as high an idea of myself and of my works as I have at this moment, when the public has decided in their favour. It ever was my opinion that the mistakes and blunders, both in a rational and religious point of view, of which we see thousands daily guilty, are owing to their ignorance of themselves.—To know myself, had been all along my constant study. I weighed myself alone; I balanced myself with others; I watched every means of information, to see how much ground I occupied as a man and as a poet; I studied assiduously Nature's design in my formation—where the lights and shades in my character were intended. I was pretty confident my poems would meet with some applause; but at the worst, the roar of the Atlantic would deafen the voice of censure, and the novelty of West Indian scenes make me forget neglect. I threw off six hundred copies, of which I had got subscriptions for about three hundred

and fifty.—My vanity was highly gratified by the reception I met with from the public; and besides I pocketed, all expenses deducted, nearly twenty pounds. This sum came very seasonably, as I was thinking of indenting myself, for want of money to procure my passage. As soon as I was master of nine guineas, the price of wafting me to the torrid zone, I took a steerage passage in the first ship that was to sail from the Clyde, for

"Hungry ruin had me in the wind."

I had been for some days skulking from covert to covert, under all the terrors of a jail; as some ill-advised people had uncoupled the merciless pack of the law at my heels. I had taken the last farewell of my few friends; my chest was on the road to Greenock; I had composed the last song I should ever measure in Caledonia—'The gloomy night is gathering fast,' when a letter from Dr Blacklock to a friend of mine, overthrew all my schemes, by opening new prospects to my poetic ambition. The doctor belonged to a set of critics, for whose applause I had not dared to hope. His opinion, that I would meet with encouragement in Edinburgh for a second edition, fired me so much, that away I posted for that city, without a single acquaintance, or a single letter of introduction. The baneful star that had so long shed its blasting influence in my zenith, for once made a revolution to the nadir; and a kind Providence placed me under the patronage of one of the noblest of men, the Earl of Glencairn. *Oublie moi, grand Dieu, si jamais je l'oublie!*

I need relate no farther. At Edinburgh I was in a new world; I mingled among many classes of men, but all of them new to me, and I was all attention to "catch" the characters and "the manners living as they rise." Whether I have profited, time will show.

. . . .

My most respectful compliments to Miss Williams. Her very elegant and friendly letter I cannot answer at

present, as my presence is requisite in Edinburgh, and I set out to-morrow. R. B.*

No. LXIX.

TO ROBERT AINSLIE, ESQ.

MAUCHLINE, *July*, 1787.

MY DEAR SIR,

MY life, since I saw you last, has been one continued hurry; that savage hospitality which knocks a man down with strong liquors, is the devil. I have a sore warfare in this world; the devil, the world, and the flesh, are three formidable foes. The first I generally try to fly from; the second, alas! generally flies from me; but the third is my plague, worse than the ten plagues of Egypt.

I have been looking over several farms in this country; one in particular, in Nithsdale, pleased me so well, that if my offer to the proprietor is accepted, I shall commence farmer at Whit-Sunday. If farming do not appear eligible, I shall have recourse to my other shift; but this to a friend.

I set out for Edinburgh on Monday morning; how long I stay there is uncertain, but you will know so soon as I can inform you myself. However I determine, poesy must be laid aside for some time; my mind has been vitiated with idleness, and it will take a good deal of effort to habituate it to the routine of business.

I am, my dear Sir,

Yours sincerely,

R. B.

* This is an exceedingly interesting piece of autobiography, and is written with great ease, vivacity, and distinctness. We wish much that all poets of equal celebrity had left equally intelligible memorials of their earlier years behind them, to afford an insight of their character, and thus guide the labours of their future biographers.—M.

No. LXX.

TO MR ROBERT MUIR.

STIRLING, 26*th August*, 1787.

MY DEAR SIR,

I INTENDED to have written you from Edinburgh, and now write you from Stirling to make an excuse. Here am I, on my way to Inverness, with a truly original, but very worthy man, à Mr Nicol, one of the masters of the High-school in Edinburgh. I left Auld Reekie yesterday morning, and have passed, besides by-excursions, Linlithgow, Borrowstouness, Falkirk, and here am I undoubtedly. This morning I knelt at the tomb of Sir John the Graham, the gallant friend of the immortal Wallace; and two hours ago I said a fervent prayer for old Caledonia over the hole in a blue whinstone, where Robert de Bruce fixed his royal standard on the banks of Bannockburn; and just now, from Stirling Castle, I have seen by the setting sun the glorious prospect of the windings of Forth through the rich carse of Stirling, and skirting the equally rich carse of Falkirk. The crops are very strong, but so very late that there is no harvest, except a ridge or two perhaps in ten miles, all the way I have travelled from Edinburgh.

I left Andrew Bruce and family all well. I will be at least three weeks in making my tour, as I shall return by the coast, and have many people to call for.

My best compliments to Charles, our dear kinsman and fellow-saint; and Messrs W. and H. Parkers. I hope Hughoc* is going on and prospering with God and Miss M'Causlin.

If I could think on any thing sprightly, I should let you hear every other post; but, a dull, matter-of-fact business

* The wee Hughoc mentioned in 'Poor Maillie.'—M.

like this scrawl, the less and seldomer one writes, the better.

Among other matters-of-fact I shall add this, that I am and ever shall be,

My dear Sir,
Your obliged,
R. B.

No. LXXI.

TO GAVIN HAMILTON, ESQ.

STIRLING, 28*th August*, 1787.

MY DEAR SIR,

HERE am I on my way to Inverness. I have rambled over the rich, fertile carses of Falkirk and Stirling, and am delighted with their appearance: richly waving crops of wheat, barley, &c., but no harvest at all yet, except in one or two places, an old-wife's ridge. Yesterday morning I rode from this town up the meandering Devon's banks, to pay my respects to some Ayrshire folks at Harvieston. After breakfast, we made a party to go and see the famous Caudron-linn, a remarkable cascade in the Devon, about five miles above Harvieston; and after spending one of the most pleasant days I ever had in my life, I returned to Stirling in the evening. They are a family, Sir, though I had not had any prior tie; though they had not been the brother and sisters of a certain generous friend of mine, I would never forget them. I am told you have not seen them these several years, so you can have very little idea of what these young folks are now. Your brother is as tall as you are, but slender rather than otherwise; and I have the satisfaction to inform you that he is getting the better of those consumptive symptoms which I suppose you know were threatening him. His make, and particularly his manner,

resemble you, but he will still have a finer face. (I put in the word *still*, to please Mrs Hamilton.) Good sense, modesty, and at the same time a just idea of that respect that man owes to man, and has a right in his turn to exact, are striking features in his character; and, what with me, is the Alpha and the Omega, he has a heart that might adorn the breast of a poet! Grace has a good figure, and the look of health and cheerfulness, but nothing else remarkable in her person. I scarcely ever saw so striking a likeness as is between her and your little Beenie; the mouth and chin particularly. She is reserved at first; but as we grew better acquainted, I was delighted with the native frankness of her manner, and the sterling sense of her observation. Of Charlotte I cannot speak in common terms of admiration: she is not only beautiful but lovely. Her form is elegant; her features not regular, but they have the smile of sweetness and the settled complacency of good nature in the highest degree; and her complexion, now that she has happily recovered her wonted health, is equal to Miss Burnet's. After the exercises of our riding to the Falls, Charlotte was exactly Dr Donne's mistress:—

> ——————"Her pure and eloquent blood
> Spoke in her cheeks, and so distinctly wrought,
> That one would almost say her body thought."

Her eyes are fascinating; at once expressive of good sense, tenderness, and a noble mind.

I do not give you all this account, my good Sir, to flatter you. I mean it to reproach you. Such relations the first peer in the realm might own with pride; then why do you not keep up more correspondence with these so amiable young folks? I had a thousand questions to answer about you. I had to describe the little ones with the minuteness of anatomy. They were highly delighted when I told them that John* was so good a boy, and so fine a scholar,

* This is the "wee curlie Johnnie," mentioned in Burns's dedication to Gavin Hamilton, Esq.—M.

and that Willie was going on still very pretty: but I have it in commission to tell her from them that beauty is a poor silly bauble without she be good. Miss Chalmers I had left in Edinburgh, but I had the pleasure of meeting with Mrs Chalmers, only Lady Mackenzie being rather a little alarmingly ill of a sore throat somewhat marred our enjoyment.

I shall not be in Ayrshire for four weeks. My most respectful compliments to Mrs Hamilton, Miss Kennedy, and Doctor Mackenzie. I shall probably write him from some stage or other.

I am ever, Sir,
Yours most gratefully,
R. B.

* A curious account of the Poet's visit, on his second tour, to Mrs Bruce, is given by Dr Adair, who married Charlotte Hamilton, the far-famed 'Maid of Devon:'—"A visit to Mrs Bruce, of Clackmannan, a lady above ninety, the lineal descendant of that race which gave the Scottish throne its brightest ornament, interested his feelings more powerfully. This venerable dame, with characteristical dignity, informed me, on my observing that I believed she was descended from the family of Robert Bruce, that Robert Bruce was sprung from her family. Though almost deprived of speech by a paralytic affection, she preserved her hospitality and urbanity. She was in possession of the hero's helmet and two-handed sword, with which she conferred on Burns and myself the honour of knighthood, remarking, that she had a better right to confer that title than some people. You will of course conclude that the old lady's political tenets were as jacobitical as the Poet's, a conformity which contributed not a little to the cordiality of our reception and entertainment. She gave as her first toast after dinner, 'Awa' Uncos,' or 'Away with the Strangers:' who these strangers were, you will readily understand."

No. LXXII.

TO MR WALKER, BLAIR OF ATHOLE.*

INVERNESS, *5th September*, 1787.

MY DEAR SIR,

I HAVE just time to write the foregoing,† and to tell you that it was (at least most part of it) the effusion of an half-hour I spent at Bruar. I do not mean it was extempore, for I have endeavoured to brush it up as well as Mr

* Professor Walker gives the following account of the Poet's tour to the north:—"Returning to Edinburgh, he chose for his partner in a new and more extended tour, Mr Nicol of the High School, a man in whom the defects of a turbulent temper, and unpolished manners, were scarcely balanced by a superior measure of scholastic attainments, and a vein of coarse irreverent wit, which the Poet was too much disposed to aid and imitate. With this gentleman he set out from Edinburgh in September, and proceeded in a post-chaise by Taymouth, Dunkeld, and Blair, to Inverness, where he turned to the South, and taking the road by the coast, arrived in Edinburgh about the middle of October. In this, as on his former excursions, he was entertained with the most flattering hospitality by various persons of distinction, to whom he was either already known, or carried letters of introduction. He passed two or three days with the Duke of Athole, and was highly delighted by the attention which he received, and the company to whom he was introduced at Blair. These, on the other hand, were no less pleased with the correct and manly deportment of the interesting stranger. At the Duke of Gordon's he appeared as an old acquaintance, the Duchess having stood foremost, during the preceding winter, among his patrons and admirers, promoting his reputation with all that elegant energy of character which so gracefully becomes her. During these visits, however, Burns was led to discover his injudicious selection of a fellow-traveller, by whose presence he was incommoded and harassed. The ill regulated temper and manners of Mr Nicol prevented Burns from introducing him to scenes where delicacy and self-denial were so much required. He was therefore left at the inns while the Poet was regaling in the higher circles; an indignity which his proud and untractable spirit could with difficulty brook. At Athole-house his impatience was suspended by engaging him in his favourite amusement of angling; but as no such device was adopted at Gordon castle, he broke out with

Nicol's chat and the jogging of the chaise would allow. It eases my heart a good deal, as rhyme is the coin with which a poet pays his debts of honour or gratitude. What I owe to the noble family of Athole, of the first kind, I shall ever proudly boast; what I owe of the last, so help me God in my hour of need! I shall never forget.

The "little angel-band!" I declare I prayed for them very sincerely to-day at the Fall of Fyers. I shall never forget the fine family-piece I saw at Blair; the amiable, the truly noble duchess, with her smiling little seraph in her lap, at the head of the table: the lovely "olive plants," as the Hebrew bard finely says, round the happy mother: the beautiful Mrs G—; the lovely, sweet Miss C. &c. I wish I had the powers of Guido to do them justice! My Lord Duke's kind hospitality—markedly kind indeed. Mr Graham of Fintry's charms of conversation—Sir W. Murray's friendship. In short, the recollection of all that polite, agreeable company raises an honest glow in my bosom.

No. LXXIII.

TO MR GILBERT BURNS.

EDINBURGH, 17*th*, *September*, 1787.

MY DEAR BROTHER,

I ARRIVED here safe yesterday evening, after a tour of twenty-two days, and travelling near six hundred miles,

unmanageable irritability, and compelled the Poet to abridge his visit. This was not only a mortifying disappointment, but in all probability a serious misfortune to Burns, as a longer stay among persons of such influence might have begot a permanent intimacy, and on their parts an active concern for his future advancement." At this time Mr Walker was tutor in the family of the duke of Athole. He was in the year 1815 appointed to the Humanity chair in the College of Glasgow, and died in 1831. He was a most amiable man and an elegant scholar.—M.

† The Humble Petition of Bruar-water, Vol. I. p. 233.

windings included. My farthest stretch was about ten miles beyond Inverness. I went through the heart of the Highlands by Crieff, Taymouth, the famous seat of Lord Breadalbane, down the Tay, among cascades and druidical circles of stones, to Dunkeld, a seat of the Duke of Athole; thence across Tay, and up one of his tributary streams to Blair of Athole, another of the duke's seats, where I had the honour of spending nearly two days with his grace and family; thence many miles through a wild country among cliffs gray with eternal snows and gloomy savage glens, till I crossed Spey and went down the stream through Strathspey, so famous in Scottish music; Badenoch, &c. till I reached Grant Castle, where I spent half a day with Sir James Grant and family; and then crossed the country for Fort George, but called by the way at Cawdor, the ancient seat of Macbeth; there I saw the identical bed in which tradition says king Duncan was murdered; lastly, from Fort George to Inverness.

I returned by the coast, through Nairn, Forres, and so on, to Aberdeen, thence to Stonehive, where James Burness, from Montrose, met me by appointment. I spent two days among our relations, and found our aunts, Jean and Isabel, still alive, and hale old women. John Cairn, though born the same year with our father, walks as vigorously as I can: they have had several letters from his son in New York. William Brand is likewise a stout old fellow; but further particulars I delay till I see you, which will be in two or three weeks. The rest of my stages are not worth rehearsing; warm as I was for Ossian's country, where I had seen his very grave, what cared I for fishing-towns or fertile carses? I slept at the famous Brodie of Brodie's one night, and dined at Gordon Castle next day, with the duke, duchess, and family. I am thinking to cause my old mare to meet me, by means of John Ronald, at Glasgow; but you shall hear farther from me before I leave Edinburgh. My duty and many compliments from the north to my mother; and my brotherly compliments

to the rest. I have been trying for a berth for William, but am not likely to be successful. Farewell.

R. B.

No. LXXIV.

TO MISS MARGARET CHALMERS,

(NOW MRS HAY, OF EDINBURGH.)

Sept. 26, 1787.

I SEND Charlotte the first number of the songs; I would not wait for the second number; I hate delays in little marks of friendship, as I hate dissimulation in the language of the heart. I am determined to pay Charlotte a poetic compliment, if I could hit on some glorious old Scotch air, in number second.* You will see a small attempt on a shred of paper in the book; but though Dr Blacklock commended it very highly, I am not just satisfied with it myself. I intend to make it a description of some kind: the whining cant of love, except in real passion, and by a masterly hand, is to me as insufferable as the preaching cant of old Father Smeaton, whig-minister at Kilmaurs. Darts, flames, cupids, loves, graces, and all that farrago, are just a Mauchline ——— a senseless rabble.

I got an excellent poetic epistle yesternight from the old, venerable author of 'Tullochgorum,' 'John of Badenyon,' &c. I suppose you know he is a clergyman. It is by far the finest poetic compliment I ever got. I will send you a copy of it.

I go on Thursday or Friday to Dumfries, to wait on Mr Miller about his farms.—Do tell that to Lady Mackenzie, that she may give me credit for a little wisdom. "I Wisdom dwell with prudence." What a blessed fire-side!

* Of the Scots Musical Museum.

How happy should I be to pass a winter evening under their venerable roof! and smoke a pipe of tobacco, or drink water-gruel with them! With solemn, lengthened, laughter-quashing gravity of phiz! What sage remarks on the good-for-nothing sons and daughters of indiscretion and folly! And what frugal lessons, as we straitened the fireside circle, on the uses of the poker and tongs!

Miss N. is very well, and begs to be remembered in the old way to you. I used all my eloquence, all the persuasive flourishes of the hand, and heart-melting modulation of periods in my power, to urge her out to Harvieston, but all in vain. My rhetoric seems quite to have lost its effect on the lovely half of mankind. I have seen the day —but this is a "tale of other years."—In my conscience I believe that my heart has been so oft on fire that it is absolutely vitrified. I look on the sex with something like the admiration with which I regard the starry sky in a frosty December night. I admire the beauty of the Creator's workmanship; I am charmed with the wild but graceful eccentricity of their motions, and—wish them good night. I mean this with respect to a certain passion *dont j'ai eu l'honneur d'etre un miserable esclave:* as for friendship, you and Charlotte have given me pleasure, permanent pleasure, "which the world cannot give, nor take away" I hope; and which will outlast the heavens and the earth.

R. B.

No. LXXV.

TO THE SAME.

Without date.

I HAVE been at Dumfries, and at one visit more shall be decided about a farm in that country. I am rather hopeless in it: but as my brother is an excellent farmer, and is, besides, an exceedingly prudent sober man (qualities which

are only a younger brother's fortune in our family), I am determined, if my Dumfries business fail me, to return into partnership with him, and at our leisure take another farm in the neighbourhood.

I assure you I look for high compliments from you and Charlotte on this very sage instance of my unfathomable, incomprehensible wisdom. Talking of Charlotte, I must tell her that I have, to the best of my power, paid her a poetic compliment now completed. The air is admirable: true old Highland. It was the tune of a Gaelic song which an Inverness lady sung me when I was there; I was so charmed with it that I begged her to write me a set of it from her singing; for it had never been set before. I am fixed that it shall go in Johnson's next number; so Charlotte and you need not spend your precious time in contradicting me. I won't say the poetry is first-rate; though I am convinced it is very well; and, what is not always the case with compliments to ladies, it is not only sincere, but just.

[Here follows the song of 'The Banks of the Devon.' See Vol. II. p. 243.]

R. B.

No. LXXVI.

TO REV. JOHN SKINNER.

EDINBURGH, *October* 25, 1787.

REVEREND AND VENERABLE SIR,

ACCEPT, in plain dull prose, my most sincere thanks for the best poetical compliment I ever received. I assure you Sir, as a poet, you have conjured up an airy demon of vanity in my fancy, which the best abilities in your other capacity would be ill able to lay. I regret, and while I live I shall regret, that when I was in the north, I had not the pleasure of paying a younger brother's dutiful respect to the author

of the best Scotch song ever Scotland saw—'Tullochgorum's my delight!' The world may think slightingly of the craft of song-making, if they please, but, as Job says—"O that mine adversary had written a book!"—let them try. There is a certain something in the old Scotch songs, a wild happiness of thought and expression, which peculiarly marks them, not only from English songs, but also from the modern efforts of song-wrights, in our native manner and language. The only remains of this enchantment, these spells of the imagination, rest with you. Our true brother, Ross of Lochlee, was likewise "owre cannie"—a "wild warlock"—but now he sings among the "sons of the morning."

I have often wished, and will certainly endeavour, to form a kind of common acquaintance among all the genuine sons of Caledonian song. The world, busy in low prosaic pursuits, may overlook most of us; but "reverence thyself." The world is not our *peers*, so we challenge the jury. We can lash that world, and find ourselves a very great source of amusement and happiness independent of that world.

There is a work going on in Edinburgh, just now, which claims your best assistance. An engraver in this town has set about collecting and publishing all the Scotch songs, with the Music, that can be found. Songs in the English language, if by Scotchmen, are admitted, but the music must all be Scotch. Drs Beattie and Blacklock are lending a hand, and the first musician in town presides over that department. I have been absolutely crazed about it, collecting old stanzas, and every information remaining respecting their origin, authors, &c. &c. This last is but a very fragment business; but at the end of his second number—the first is already published—a small account will be given of the authors, particularly to preserve those of latter times. Your three songs, 'Tullochgorum,' 'John of Badenyon,' and 'Ewie wi' the crookit Horn,' go in this second number. I was determined, before I got your letter, to write you, begging that you would let me know where the

editions of these pieces may be found, as you would wish them to continue in future times: and if you would be so kind to this undertaking as send any songs, of your own or others, that you would think proper to publish, your name will be inserted among the other authors,—"Nill ye, will ye." One half of Scotland already give your songs to other authors. Paper is done. I beg to hear from you; the sooner the better, as I leave Edinburgh in a fortnight or three weeks.—I am,

With the warmest sincerity, Sir,

Your obliged humble servant,

R. B.

No. LXXVII.

TO JAMES HOY, ESQ.

GORDON CASTLE.

EDINBURGH, *30th October*, 1787.

SIR,

I will defend my conduct in giving you this trouble, on the best of Christian principles—"Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them." —I shall certainly, among my legacies, leave my latest curse to that unlucky predicament which hurried—tore me away from Castle Gordon. May that obstinate son of Latin prose [Nicol] be curst to Scotch mile periods, and damned to seven league paragraphs; while Declension and Conjugation, Gender, Number, and Tense, under the ragged banners of Dissonance and Disarrangement, eternally rank against him in hostile array.

Allow me, Sir, to strengthen the small claim I have to your acquaintance, by the following request. An engraver, James Johnson, in Edinburgh, has, not from mercenary views, but from an honest Scotch enthusiasm, set about

collecting all our native songs and setting them to music; particularly those that have never been set before. Clarke, the well-known musician, presides over the musical arrangement, and Drs Beattie and Blacklock, Mr Tytler of Woodhouselee, and your humble servant to the utmost of his small power, assist in collecting the old poetry, or sometimes for a fine air make a stanza when it has no words. The brats, too tedious to mention, claim a parental pang from my bardship. I suppose it will appear in Johnson's second number—the first was published before my acquaintance with him. My request is—'Cauld Kail in Aberdeen' is one intended for this number, and I beg a copy of his Grace of Gordon's words to it, which you were so kind as to repeat to me. You may be sure we won't prefix the author's name, except you like, though I look on it as no small merit to this work that the names of so many of the authors of our old Scotch songs, names almost forgotten, will be inserted. I do not well know where to write to you —I rather write at you; but if you will be so obliging, immediately on receipt of this, as to write me a few lines, I shall perhaps pay you in kind, though not in quality. Johnson's terms are:—each number a handsome pocket volume, to consist at least of a hundred Scotch songs, with basses for the harpsichord, &c. The price to subscribers *5s.*; to non-subscribers *6s.* He will have three numbers I conjecture.

My direction for two or three weeks will be at Mr William Cruikshank's, St James's-square, New-town, Edinburgh.

I am,
Sir,
Yours to command,

R. B.

No. LXXVIII.

TO JAMES HOY, ESQ. GORDON CASTLE.*

EDINBURGH, *6th November*, 1787.

DEAR SIR,

I WOULD have wrote you immediately on receipt of your kind letter, but a mixed impulse of gratitude and esteem whispered to me that I ought to send you something by way of return. When a poet owes anything, particularly

* The following sketch of Mr Hoy appeared shortly after his death in the Inverness Courier, of April 30, 1828, written by our talented friend, Mr Robert Carruthers, editor of that Journal:—

"The late Mr James Hoy, librarian to the duke of Gordon, was, in many respects, a singular and original character. In goodness of heart, and simplicity of manners, he was not unlike Dominie Sampson himself; and, during the long period of forty-six years, during which he was the inmate of a ducal mansion, he lost not a shade of his originality, or abated one jot of his stoical indifference to riches. The love of learning and of virtue which distinguished Mr Hoy, added to his simple and primitive habits, rendered him universally respected and noted in the neighbourhood of Gordon Castle; and in the noble family in which he resided, he maintained with all the same familiar footing that his celebrated prototype, whom we have named above, preserved at Ellangowan. Mr Hoy was born at Haining, in Selkirkshire, in the year 1747. His father was gardener to Pringle of Haining, or Clifton, afterwards Lord Ailmore, one of the lords of session, and his lordship's daughter Miss Violet Pringle, observing young Hoy to be a steady sedate lad, had him educated, according to his parents' wishes, for the dissenting church. Lord Ailmore becoming blind, young Hoy was engaged to be his reader and companion. Even at this early period, he must have discovered considerable signs of scientific genius, for he had an offer to go to Ireland with Banks and Solander, as botanist, and to assist in other departments of science.

"It was as a sort of literary companion, and as one able to scale the different heights and bearings round Gordon Castle, that Mr Hoy was recommended to the duke, and scarcely any other situation could have been so admirably calculated to promote his own happiness; for, as his whole enjoyment was in books, so that which was his delight now became his duty. To him the charge of the duke's library was committed. It became the castle of which he was appointed governor, and he was never out of his garrison ex-

when he is indebted for good offices, the payment that usually recurs to him—the only coin indeed in which he is probably conversant—is rhyme. Johnson sends the books by the fly, as directed, and begs me to inclose his most

cept at meal-times, or when called into the fields by his scientific pursuits; or on Sundays, when he never failed, let the weather be what it might, to mount his horse, to ride to Elgin to attend the Seceder meeting-house. As the duke's engagements and occupations deprived him of sufficient leisure to peruse the numerous books of miscellaneous information which were continually appearing, it became Mr Hoy's business to devote his forenoons to reading them as they arrived; and then he was enabled, as they sat tete a tete over their bottle of claret together after dinner, to fill the duke with all that was worth remembering, and his grace's memory was such, that it never afterwards lost what it thus received.

"Mr Hoy's chief sciences were astronomy, entomology, and botany. To the first of these he adhered steadily to his dying day, and made almost daily observations on the heavenly bodies, and from his having undertaken the regulation of the clocks at Gordon castle and Fochabers, it was matter of notoriety that his was the only accurately kept time in the north of Scotland.

"We need scarcely say that Mr Hoy was quite indifferent to fame; he equally despised riches, never seeking for more than might enable him to dispense some charities, and to afford himself respectable clothes, of which he never had more than two suits at a time. When his kind and indulgent patron voluntarily offered him an addition to his sixty-pound salary, he replied, 'Keep it to yoursel', my lord duke, I'm no needin' mair; ye hae as muckle need o't as I hae.' When Burns was at Gordon castle he was particularly delighted with Hoy's blunt manner, and perhaps the circumstance of his being a native of the Borders gave him an additional value in the Poet's estimation. Mr Hoy left orders in his will that his remains should be interred in the churchyard of the cathedral 'near his auld frien' Mr Duncan,' the Seceder minister, to whom he had listened so many years of his life, in defiance of the wind, rain, snow, or sunshine that may have vainly assailed him during his hebdomadal rides to Elgin.

"The old librarian followed his noble master to the grave, after the interval of a few short months, and we cannot take our leave of him better than in the well-known words of the immortal dramatist: —

> "O good old man! how well in thee appears
> The constant service of the antique world,
> When service sweat for duty, not for meed! M.

grateful thanks: my return I intended should have been one or two poetic bagatelles which the world have not seen, or, perhaps, for obvious reasons, cannot see. These I shall send you before I leave Edinburgh. They may make you laugh a little, which, on the whole, is no bad way of spending one's precious hours and still more precious breath: at any rate, they will be, though a small, yet a very sincere mark of my respectful esteem for a gentleman whose farther acquaintance I should look upon as a peculiar obligation.

The duke's song, independent totally of his dukeship, charms me. There is I know not what of wild happiness of thought and expression peculiarly beautiful in the old Scottish song style, of which his Grace, old venerable Skinner, the author of 'Tullochgorum,' &c., and the late Ross, at Lochlee, of true Scottish poetic memory, are the only modern instances that I recollect, since Ramsay with his contemporaries, and poor Bob Fergusson went to the world of deathless existence and truly immortal song. The mob of mankind, that many-headed beast, would laugh at so serious a speech about an old song; but, as Job says, "O that mine adversary had written a book!' Those who think that composing a Scotch song is a trifling business—let them try.

I wish my Lord Duke would pay a proper attention to the Christian admonition—"Hide not your candle under a bushel," but "Let your light shine before men." I could name half a dozen dukes that I guess are a devilish deal worse employed; nay, I question if there are half a dozen better: perhaps there are not half that scanty number whom Heaven has favoured with the tuneful, happy, and, I will say, glorious gift.

I am, dear Sir,
Your obliged humble servant,
R. B.

No. LXXIX.

TO ROBERT AINSLIE, ESQ., EDINBURGH.

EDINBURGH, *Sunday Morning, Nov.* 23, 1787.

I BEG, my dear Sir, you would not make any appointment to take us to Mr Ainslie's to-night. On looking over my engagements, constitution, present state of my health, some little vexatious soul concerns, &c., I find I can't sup abroad to-night. I shall be in to-day till one o'clock if you have a leisure hour.

You will think it romantic when I tell you, that I find the idea of your friendship almost necessary to my existence. You assume a proper length of face in my bitter hours of blue-devilism, and you laugh fully up to my highest wishes at my good things.—I don't know upon the whole, if you are one of the first fellows in God's world, but you are so to me. I tell you this just now in the conviction that some inequalities in my temper and manner may perhaps sometimes make you suspect that I am not so warmly as I ought to be your friend.

R. B.

No. LXXX.

TO THE EARL OF GLENCAIRN.

EDINBURGH, 1787.

MY LORD,

I KNOW your lordship will disapprove of my ideas in a request I am going to make to you; but I have weighed, long and seriously weighed, my situation, my hopes, and turn of mind, and am fully fixed to my scheme, if I can possibly effectuate it. I wish to get into the Excise: I am told that your lordship's interest will easily procure me the

grant from the commissioners ; and your lordship s patronage and goodness, which have already rescued me from obscurity, wretchedness, and exile, embolden me to ask that interest. You have likewise put it in my power to save the little tie of home that sheltered an aged mother, two brothers, and three sisters from destruction. There, my lord, you have bound me over to the highest gratitude.

My brother's farm is but a wretched lease, but I think he will probably weather out the remaining seven years of it; and after the assistance which I have given, and will give him, to keep the family together, I think, by my guess, I shall have rather better than two hundred pounds, and instead of seeking, what is almost impossible at present to find, a farm that I can certainly live by, with so small a stock, I shall lodge this sum in a banking-house, a sacred deposit, excepting only the calls of uncommon distress or necessitous old age.

These, my lord, are my views: I have resolved from the maturest deliberation ; and now I am fixed, I shall leave no stone unturned to carry my resolve into execution. Your lordship's patronage is the strength of my hopes ; nor have I yet applied to any body else. Indeed my heart sinks within me at the idea of applying to any other of the great who have honoured me with their countenance. I am ill-qualified to dog the heels of greatness with the impertinence of solicitation, and tremble nearly as much at the thought of the cold promise as the cold denial ; but to your lordship I have not only the honour, the comfort, but the pleasure of being

Your lordship's much obliged
And deeply indebted humble servant,
R. B.

No. LXXXI.

TO JAMES DALRYMPLE, ESQ.,

ORANGEFIELD.

EDINBURGH, 1787.

DEAR SIR,

I SUPPOSE the devil is so elated with his success with you, that he is determined by a *coup de main* to complete his purposes on you all at once, in making you a poet. I broke open the letter you sent me; hummed over the rhymes; and, as I saw they were extempore, said to myself, they were very well; but when I saw at the bottom a name that I shall ever value with grateful respect, "I gapit wide, but naething spak." I was nearly as much struck as the friends of Job, of affliction-bearing memory, when they sat down with him seven days and seven nights, and spake not a word.

I am naturally of a superstitious cast, and as soon as my wonder-scared imagination regained its consciousness, and resumed its functions, I cast about what this mania of yours might portend. My foreboding ideas had the wide stretch of possibility; and several events, great in their magnitude, and important in their consequences, occurred to my fancy. The downfall of the conclave, or the crushing of the Cork rumps; a ducal coronet to Lord George Gordon, and the protestant interest; or St Peter's keys to * * * * *.

You want to know how I come on. I am just in *statu quo*, or, not to insult a gentleman with my Latin, in "auld use and wont." The noble Earl of Glencairn took me by the hand to-day, and interested himself in my concerns, with a goodness like that benevolent Being whose image he so richly bears. He is a stronger proof of the immortality of the soul than any that philosophy ever produced. A mind like his can never die. Let the worshipful squire H. L., or the reverend Mass J. M. go into their primitive

nothing. At best, they are but ill-digested lumps of chaos, only one of them strongly tinged with bituminous particles and sulphureous effluvia. But my noble patron, eternal as the heroic swell of magnanimity, and the generous throb of benevolence, shall look on with princely eye at "the war of elements, the wreck of matter, and the crush of worlds."

R. B.

No. LXXXII.

TO MISS M——N.

Saturday Noon, No. 2, St James's Square,
NEW TOWN, EDINBURGH.

HERE have I sat, my dear Madam, in the stony altitude of perplexed study for fifteen vexatious minutes, my head askew, bending over the intended card; my fixed eye insensible to the very light of day poured around; my pendulous goose-feather, loaded with ink, hanging over the future letter, all for the important purpose of writing a complimentary card to accompany your trinket.

Compliment is such a miserable Greenland expression, lies at such a chilly polar distance from the torrid zone of my constitution, that I cannot for the very soul of me, use it to any person for whom I have the twentieth part of the esteem every one must have for you who knows you.

As I leave town in three or four days, I can give myself the pleasure of calling on you only for a minute. Tuesday evening, some time about seven or after, I shall wait on you for your farewell commands.

The hinge of your box I put into the hands of the proper connoisseur. The broken glass, likewise, went under review; but deliberative wisdom thought it would too much endanger the whole fabric.

I am, dear Madam,

With all sincerity of enthusiasm,

Your very obedient servant,—R. B.

No. LXXXIII.

TO MISS CHALMERS.

EDINBURGH, *Nov.* 21, 1787.

I HAVE one vexatious fault to the kindly welcome, well-filled sheet which I owe to your and Charlotte's goodness —it contains too much sense, sentiment, and good-spelling. It is impossible that even you two, whom I declare to my God I will give credit for any degree of excellence the sex are capable of attaining, it is impossible you can go on to correspond at that rate; so, like those who, Shenstone says, retire because they have made a good speech, I shall, after a few letters, hear no more of you. I insist that you shall write whatever comes first: what you see, what you read, what you hear, what you admire, what you dislike, trifles, bagatelles, nonsense; or to fill up a corner, e'en put down a laugh at full length. Now none of your polite hints about flattery; I leave that to your lovers, if you have or shall have any; though, thank heaven, I have found at last two girls who can be luxuriantly happy in their own minds and with one another, without that commonly necessary appendage to female bliss—A LOVER.

Charlotte and you are just two favourite resting-places for my soul in her wanderings through the weary, thorny wilderness of this world. God knows, I am ill-fitted for the struggle: I glory in being a Poet, and I want to be thought a wise man—I would fondly be generous, and I wish to be rich. After all, I am afraid I am a lost subject. "Some folk hae a hantle o' fauts, and I'm but a ne'er-do-weel."

Afternoon.—To close the melancholy reflections at the end of last sheet, I shall just add a piece of devotion, commonly known in Carrick by the title of the "Wabster's grace:"—

"Some say we're thieves, and e'en sae are we,
Some say we lie, and e'en sae do we!
Gude forgie us, and I hope sae will he!
——Up and to your looms, lads."

R. B.

No. LXXXIV.

TO THE SAME.

EDINBURGH, *Dec.* 12, 1787.

I AM here under the care of a surgeon, with a bruised limb extended on a cushion; and the tints of my mind vying with the livid horror preceding a midnight thunder-storm. A drunken coachman was the cause of the first, and incomparably the lightest evil; misfortune, bodily constitution, hell, and myself have formed a "quadruple alliance" to guarantee the other. I got my fall on Saturday, and am getting slowly better.

I have taken tooth and nail to the Bible, and am got through the five books of Moses, and half way in Joshua. It is really a glorious book. I sent for my book-binder today, and ordered him to get me an octavo Bible in sheets, the best paper and print in town; and bind it with all the elegance of his craft.

I would give my best song to my worst enemy—I mean the merit of making it—to have you and Charlotte by me. You are angelic creatures, and would pour oil and wine into my wounded spirit.

I inclose you a proof copy of the 'Banks of the Devon,' which present with my best wishes to Charlotte. The 'Ochil-hills' you shall probably have next week for yourself. None of your fine speeches!

R. B.

No. LXXXV.

TO THE SAME.

EDINBURGH, 19*th Dec.* 1787.

I BEGIN this letter in answer to yours of the 17th current, which is not yet cold since I read it. The atmosphere of my soul is vastly clearer than when I wrote you last. For the first time, yesterday I crossed the room on crutches. It would do your heart good to see my bardship, not on my poetic, but on my oaken stilts; throwing my best leg with an air! and with as much hilarity in my gait and countenance, as a May frog leaping across the newly harrowed ridge, enjoying the fragrance of the refreshed earth, after the long expected shower!

I can't say I am altogether at my ease when I see any where in my path that meagre, squalid, famine-faced spectre, poverty; attended as he always is, by iron fisted oppression, and leering contempt; but I have sturdily withstood his buffetings many a hard-laboured day already, and still my motto is—I DARE! My worst enemy is *moi même.* I lie so miserably open to the inroads and incursions of a mischievous, light-armed, well-mounted banditti, under the banners of imagination, whim, caprice, and passion; and the heavy-armed veteran regulars of wisdom, prudence, and forethought move so very, very slow, that I am almost in a state of perpetual warfare, and, alas! frequent defeat. There are just two creatures I would envy, a horse in his wild state traversing the forests of Asia, or an oyster on some of the desert shores of Europe. The one has not a wish without enjoyment, the other has neither wish nor fear.

R. B.

No. LXXXVI.

TO SIR JOHN WHITEFOORD.

EDINBURGH, *December*, 1787.

SIR,

MR MACKENZIE, in Mauchline, my very warm and worthy friend, has informed me how much you are pleased to interest yourself in my fate as a man, and (what to me is incomparably dearer) my fame as a poet. I have, Sir, in one or two instances, been patronized by those of your character in life, when I was introduced to their notice by * * * * * friends to them, and honoured acquaintances to me; but you are the first gentleman in the country whose benevolence and goodness of heart has interested himself for me, unsolicited and unknown. I am not master enough of the etiquette of these matters to know, nor did I stay to inquire, whether formal duty bade, or cold propriety disallowed, my thanking you in this manner, as I am convinced, from the light in which you kindly view me, that you will do me the justice to believe this letter is not the manœuvre of the needy, sharping author, fastening on those in upper life, who honour him with a little notice of him or his works. Indeed, the situation of poets is generally such, to a proverb, as may, in some measure, palliate that prostitution of heart and talents they have at times been guilty of. I do not think prodigality is, by any means, a necessary concomitant of a poetic turn, but I believe a careless, indolent attention to economy, is almost inseparable from it; then there must be in the heart of every bard of Nature's making, a certain modest sensibility, mixed with a kind of pride, that will ever keep him out of the way of those windfalls of fortune which frequently light on hardy impudence and foot-licking servility. It is not easy to imagine a more helpless state than his whose poetic fancy unfits him for the world, and whose character as a scholar gives him some pretentions to the *politesse* of life—yet is as poor as I am.

For my part, I thank Heaven my star has been kinder; learning never elevated my ideas above the peasant's shed, and I have an independent fortune at the plough-tail.

I was surprised to hear that any one who pretended in the least to the manners of the gentleman, should be so foolish, or worse, as to stoop to traduce the morals of such a one as I am, and so unhumanly cruel, too, as to meddle with that late most unfortunate, unhappy part of my story. With a tear of gratitude, I thank you, Sir, for the warmth, with which you interposed in behalf of my conduct. I am, I acknowledge, too frequently the sport of whim, caprice, and passion, but reverence to God, and integrity to my fellow-creatures, I hope I shall ever preserve. I have no return, Sir, to make you for your goodness but one—a return which, I am persuaded, will not be unacceptable—the honest, warm wishes of a grateful heart for your happiness, and every one of that lovely flock, who stand to you in a filial relation. If ever calumny aim the poisoned shaft at them, may friendship be by to ward the blow!

R. B.

No. LXXXVII.

TO MISS WILLIAMS,

ON READING THE POEM OF THE SLAVE TRADE.

EDINBURGH, *Dec.* 1787.

I KNOW very little of scientific criticism, so all I can pretend to in that intricate art is merely to note, as I read along, what passages strike me as being uncommonly beautiful, and where the expression seems to be perplexed or faulty.

The poem opens finely. There are none of these idle prefatory lines which one may skip over before one comes to the subject. Verses 9th and 10th in particular,

> "Where ocean's unseen bound
> Leaves a drear world of waters round,"

are truly beautiful. The simile of the hurricane is likewise fine; and, indeed, beautiful as the poem is, almost all the similes rise decidedly above it. From verse 31st to verse 50th is a pretty eulogy on Britain. Verse 36th, "That foul drama deep with wrong," is nobly expressive. Verse 46th, I am afraid, is rather unworthy of the rest; "to dare to feel" is an idea that I do not altogether like. The contrast of valour and mercy, from the 46th verse to the 50th, is admirable.

Either my apprehension is dull, or there is something a little confused in the apostrophe to Mr Pitt. Verse 55th is the antecedent to verses 57th and 58th, but in verse 58th the connection seems ungrammatical:—

"Powers * * * * *
* * * * * *
With no gradations mark'd their flight,
But rose at once to glory's height."

Ris'n should be the word instead of rose. Try it in prose Powers,—their flight marked by no gradations, but [the same powers] risen at once to the height of glory. Likewise, verse 53d, "For this," is evidently meant to lead on the sense of the verses 59th, 60th, 61st, and 62d: but let us try how the thread of connection runs,—

"For this * * * *
* * * * *
The deeds of mercy, that embrace
A distant sphere, an alien race,
Shall virtue's lips record, and claim
The fairest honours of thy name."

I beg pardon if I misapprehend the matter, but this appears to me the only imperfect passage in the poem. The comparison of the sun-beam is fine.

The compliment to the Duke of Richmond is, I hope, as just as it is certainly elegant. The thought,

"Virtue * * * * *
* * * * * *
Sends from her unsullied source,
The gems of thought their purest force,"

is exceeding beautiful. The idea, from verse 81st to the

85th, that the "blest decree" is like the beams of morning ushering in the glorious day of liberty, ought not to pass unnoticed or unapplauded. From verse 85th to verse 108th, is an animated contrast between the unfeeling selfishness of the oppressor on the one hand, and the misery of the captive on the other. Verse 88th might perhaps be amended thus: "Nor ever *quit* her narrow maze." We are said to *pass* a bound, but we *quit* a maze. Verse 100th is exquisitely beautiful:—

"They, whom wasted blessings tire."

Verse 110th is I doubt a clashing of metaphors; "to load a span" is, I am afraid, an unwarrantable expression. In verse 114th, "Cast the universe in shade," is a fine idea. From the 115th verse to the 142d is a striking description of the wrongs of the poor African. Verse 120th, "The load of unremitted pain," is a remarkable, strong expression. The address to the advocates for abolishing the slave-trade, from verse 143d to verse 208th is animated with the true life of genius. The picture of oppression,—

"While she links her impious chain,
And calculates the price of pain;
Weighs agony in sordid scales,
And marks if death or life prevails,"—

is nobly executed.

What a tender idea is in verse 180th! Indeed that whole description of home may vie with Thomson's description of home, somewhere in the beginning of his Autumn. I do not remember to have seen a stronger expression of misery than is contained in these verses:—

"Condemned, severe extreme, to live
When all is fled that life can give."

The comparison of our distant joys to distant objects is equally original and striking.

The character and manners of the dealer in the infernal traffic is a well done though a horrid picture. I am not sure how far introducing the sailor was right; for though the sailor's common characteristic is generosity, yet, in this case,

he is certainly not only an unconcerned witness, but, in some degree, an efficient agent in the business. Verse 224th is a nervous . . . . expressive—"The heart convulsive anguish breaks." The description of the captive wretch when he arrives in the West Indies, is carried on with equal spirit. The thought that the oppressor's sorrow on seeing the slave pine, is like the butcher's regret when his destined lamb dies a natural death, is exceedingly fine.

I am got so much into the cant of criticism, that I begin to be afraid lest I have nothing except the cant of it; and instead of elucidating my author, am only benighting myself. For this reason, I will not pretend to go through the whole poem. Some few remaining beautiful lines, however, I cannot pass over. Verse 280th is the strongest description of selfishness I ever saw. The comparison in verses 285th and 286th is new and fine; and the line, 'Your arms to penury you lend," is excellent.

In verse 317th, "like" should certainly be "as" or "so;" for instance—

> "His sway the hardened bosom leads
> To cruelty's remorseless deeds:
> As (or, so) the blue lightning when it springs
> With fury on its livid wings,
> Darts on the goal with rapid force,
> Nor heeds that ruin marks its course."

If you insert the word "like" where I have placed "as,' you must alter "darts" to "darting," and "heeds" to "heeding," in order to make it grammar. A tempest is a favourite subject with the poets, but I do not remember anything even in Thomson's Winter, superior to your verses from the 347th to the 351st. Indeed, the last simile, beginning with "Fancy may dress," &c., and ending with the 350th verse, is, in my opinion, the most beautiful passage in the poem; it would do honour to the greatest names that ever graced our profession.

I will not beg your pardon, Madam, for these strictures, as my conscience tells me, that for once in my life I have

acted up to the duties of a Christian, in doing as I would be done by.

R. B.

No. LXXXVIII.

TO MR RICHARD BROWN, IRVINE.

EDINBURGH, 30*th Dec.* 1787.

MY DEAR SIR,

I HAVE met with few things in life which have given me more pleasure than Fortune's kindness to you since those days in which we met in the vale of misery; as I can honestly say, that I never knew a man who more truly deserved it, or to whom my heart more truly wished it. I have been much indebted since that time to your story and sentiments for steeling my mind against evils, of which I have had a pretty decent share. My will-o'-wisp fate you know: do you recollect a Sunday we spent together in Eglinton woods? You told me, on my repeating some verses to you, that you wondered I could resist the temptation of sending verses of such merit to a magazine. It was from this remark I derived that idea of my own pieces, which encouraged me to endeavour at the character of a poet. I am happy to hear that you will be two or three months at home. As soon as a bruised limb will permit me I shall return to Ayrshire, and we shall meet; "and faith, I hope we'll not sit dumb, nor yet cast out!"

I have much to tell you "of men, their manners, and their ways," perhaps a little of the other sex. Apropos, I beg to be remembered to Mrs Brown. There I doubt not, my dear friend, but you have found substantial happiness. I expect to find you something of an altered but not a different man; the wild, bold, generous young fellow composed into the steady affectionate husband, and the fond careful parent. For me I am just the same will-o'-

wisp being I used to be. About the first and fourth quarters of the moon, I generally set in for the trade wind of wisdom; but about the full and change, I am the luckless victim of mad tornadoes, which blow me into chaos. Almighty love still reigns and revels in my bosom; and I am at this moment ready to hang myself for a young Edinburgh widow, who has wit and wisdom more murderously fatal than the assassinating stiletto of the Sicilian banditti, or the poisoned arrow of the savage African. My highland dirk, that used to hang beside my crutches, I have gravely removed into a neighbouring closet, the key of which I cannot command in case of spring-tide paroxysms. You may guess of her wit by the following verses, which she sent me the other day:—

"Talk not of love, it gives me pain,
For love has been my foe;
He bound me with an iron chain,
And plunged me deep in woe!

"But friendship's pure and lasting joys,
My heart was formed to prove,—
There welcome win and wear the prize,
But never talk of love!

"Your friendship much can make me blest—
O why that bliss destroy?
Why urge the odious one request,
You know I must deny?"

My best compliments to our friend Allan. Adieu!

R. B.

No. LXXXIX.

TO GAVIN HAMILTON.

EDINBURGH, *Dec.* 1787.

MY DEAR SIR,

IT is indeed with the highest pleasure that I congratulate you on the return of days of ease and nights of pleasure,

after the horrid hours of misery in which I saw you suffering existence when last in Ayrshire; I seldom pray for anybody, "I'm baith dead-sweer and wretched ill o't;" but most fervently do I beseech the Power that directs the world, that you may live long and be happy, but live no longer than you are happy. It is needless for me to advise you to have a reverend care of your health. I know you will make it a point never at one time to drink more than a pint of wine (I mean an English pint), and that you will never be witness to more than one bowl of punch at a time, and that cold drams you will never more taste; and, above all things, I am convinced, that after drinking perhaps boiling punch, you will never mount your horse and gallop home in a chill late hour. Above all things, as I understand you are in the habits of intimacy with that Boanerges of gospel powers, Father Auld, be earnest with him that he will wrestle in prayer for you, that you may see the vanity of vanities in trusting to, or even practising the casual moral works of charity, humanity, generosity, and forgiveness of things, which you practised so flagrantly that it was evident you delighted in them, neglecting, or perhaps profanely despising, the wholesome doctrine of faith without works, the only anchor of salvation. A hymn of thanksgiving would, in my opinion, be highly becoming from you at present, and in my zeal for your well-being, I earnestly press on you to be diligent in chaunting over the two inclosed pieces of sacred poesy. My best compliments to Mrs Hamilton and Miss Kennedy.

Yours, &c.

R. B

No. XC.

TO MISS CHALMERS.

EDINBURGH, *Dec.* 1787.

MY DEAR MADAM,

I JUST now have read yours. The poetic compliments I pay cannot be misunderstood. They are neither of them so particular as to point you out to the world at large; and the circle of your acquaintances will allow all I have said. Besides, I have complimented you chiefly, almost solely, on your mental charms. Shall I be plain with you? I will; so look to it. Personal attractions, madam, you have much above par; wit, understanding, and worth, you possess in the first class. This is a cursed flat way of telling you these truths, but let me hear no more of your sheepish timidity. I know the world a little. I know what they will say of my poems; by second sight I suppose; for I am seldom out in my conjectures; and you may believe me, my dear madam, I would not run any risk of hurting you by any ill-judged compliment. I wish to show to the world the odds between a poet's friends and those of simple prosemen. More for your information, both the pieces go in. One of them, 'Where braving angry winter's storms,' is already set—the tune is Neil Gow's Lamentation for *Abercairny;* the other is to be set to an old Highland air in Daniel Dow's collection of ancient Scots music; the name is '*Ha a Chaillich air mo Dheith.*' My treacherous memory has forgot every circumstance about *Les Incas*, only I think you mentioned them as being in Creech's possession. I shall ask him about it. I am afraid the song of 'Somebody' will come too late—as I shall, for certain, leave town in a week for Ayrshire, and from that to Dumfries, but there my hopes are slender. I leave my direction in town, so any thing, wherever I am, will reach me.

I saw yours to ———; it is not too severe, nor did he take it amiss. On the contrary, like a whipt spaniel, he talks of being with you in the Christmas days. Mr ——— has given him the invitation, and he is determined to accept of it. O selfishness! he owns, in his sober moments, that from his own volatility of inclination, the circumstances in which he is situated, and his knowledge of his father's disposition, the whole affair is chimerical,—yet he *will* gratify an idle *penchant* at the enormous, cruel expense, of perhaps ruining the peace of the very woman for whom he professes the generous passion of love! He is a gentleman in his mind and manners—*tant pis!* He is a volatile school-boy—the heir of a man's fortune who well knows the value of two times two!

Perdition seize them and their fortunes, before they should make the amiable, the lovely ———, the derided object of their purse-proud contempt!

I am doubly happy to hear of Mrs ———'s recovery, because I really thought all was over with her. There are days of pleasure yet awaiting her:—

> "As I came in by Glenap,
> I met with an aged woman;
> She bade me cheer up my heart,
> For the best o' my days was comin'."

This day will decide my affairs with Creech. Things are, like myself, not what they ought to be; yet better than what they appear to be.

> "Heaven's Sovereign saves all beings but himself—
> That hideous sight—a naked human heart."

Farewell! remember me to Charlotte.

R. B.

No. XCI.

TO MRS DUNLOP.

EDINBURGH, *January* 21, 1788.

AFTER six weeks' confinement, I am beginning to walk across the room. They have been six horrible weeks; anguish and low spirits made me unfit to read, write, or think.

I have a hundred times wished that one could resign life as an officer resigns a commission: for I would not take in any poor, ignorant wretch, by selling out. Lately I was a sixpenny private; and, God knows, a miserable soldier enough; now I march to the campaign, a starving cadet: a little more conspicuously wretched.

I am ashamed of all this; for though I do want bravery for the warfare of life, I could wish, like some other soldiers, to have as much fortitude or cunning as to dissemble or conceal my cowardice.

As soon as I can bear the journey, which will be, I suppose, about the middle of next week, I leave Edinburgh; and soon after I shall pay my grateful duty at Dunlop-House.

R. B.*

No. XCII.

TO THE SAME.

EDINBURGH, *February* 12, 1788.

SOME things in your late letters hurt me: not that *you say them*, but that *you mistake me*. Religion, my honoured Madam, has not only been all my life my chief de-

* "This is one of the best amongst a whole series of eloquent hypochondriasm."—*Jeffrey*.

pendance but my dearest enjoyment. I have, indeed, been the luckless victim of wayward follies; but, alas! I have ever been "more fool than knave." A mathematician without religion is a probable character; an irreligious poet is a monster.

R. B.

No. XCIII.

TO THE REV. JOHN SKINNER.

EDINBURGH, 14*th February*, 1788.

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,

I HAVE been a cripple now near three months, though I am getting vastly better, and have been very much hurried beside, or else I would have wrote you sooner. I must beg your pardon for the epistle you sent me appearing in the Magazine. I had given a copy or two to some of my intimate friends, but did not know of the printing of it till the publication of the Magazine. However, as it does great honour to us both, you will forgive it.

The second volume of the songs I mentioned to you in my last is published to-day. I send you a copy, which I beg you will accept as a mark of the veneration I have long had, and shall ever have, for your character, and of the claim I make to your continued acquaintance. Your songs appear in the third volume, with your name in the index; as I assure you, Sir, I have heard your 'Tullochgorum,' particularly among our west-country folks, given to many different names, and most commonly to the immortal author of 'The Minstrel,' who, indeed, never wrote any thing superior to 'Gie's a sang, Montgomery cried." Your brother has promised me your verses to the Marquis of Huntley's reel, which certainly deserve a place in the collection. My kind host, Mr Cruikshank, of the high-school here, and said to be one of the best Latins in this age, begs me

to make you his grateful acknowledgments for the entertainment he has got in a Latin publication of yours, that I borrowed for him from your acquaintance and much respected friend in this place, the Reverend Dr Webster. Mr Cruikshank maintains that you write the best Latin since Buchanan. I leave Edinburgh to-morrow, but shall return in three weeks. Your song you mentioned in your last, to the tune of 'Dumbarton Drums,' and the other, which you say was done by a brother in trade of mine, a ploughman, I shall thank you for a copy of each. I am ever, Reverend Sir, with the most respectful esteem and sincere veneration, yours,

R. B.*

* The letter from the Rev. John Skinner, to which the above is a reply, supplying some information about Scottish song, we subjoin:—

LINSHEART, *14th November*, 1787.

"SIR,—Your kind return without date, but of post-mark October 25th, came to my hand only this day; and, to testify my punctuality to my poetic engagement, I sit down immediately to answer it in kind. Your acknowledgment of my poor but just encomiums on your surprising genius, and your opinion of my rhyming excursions, are both, I think, by far too high. The difference between our two tracks of education and ways of life is entirely in your favour, and gives you the preference every manner of way. I know a classical education will not create a versifying taste, but it mightily improves and assists it; and though, where both these meet, there may sometimes be ground for approbation, yet where taste appears single, as it were, and neither cramped nor supported by acquisition, I will always sustain the justice of its prior claim to applause. A small portion of taste, this way, I have had almost from childhood, especially in the old Scottish dialect: and it is as old a thing as I remember, my fondness for 'Christ-kirk o' the Green,' which I had by heart ere I was twelve years of age, and which, some years ago, I attempted to turn into Latin verse. While I was young, I dabbled a good deal in these things; but, on getting the black gown, I gave it pretty much over, till my daughters grew up, who, being all good singers, plagued me for words to some of their favourite tunes, and so extorted these effusions, which have made a public appearance beyond my expectations, and contrary to my intentions, at the same time that I hope there is nothing

No. XCIV.

TO RICHARD BROWN.

EDINBURGH, *February 15th*, 1788.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I RECEIVED yours with the greatest pleasure. I shall arrive at Glasgow on Monday evening; and beg, if possible, you will meet me on Tuesday. I shall wait you Tuesday all

to be found in them uncharacteristic, or unbecoming the cloth, which I would always wish to see respected.

"As to the assistance you propose from me in the undertaking you are engaged in,* I am sorry I cannot give it so far as I could wish, and you perhaps expect. My daughters, who were my only intelligencers, are all *foris-familiate*, and the old woman their mother has lost that taste. There are two from my own pen, which I might give you, if worth the while. One to the old Scotch tune of 'Dumbarton's Drums.'

"The other, perhaps, you have met with, as your noble friend the duchess has, I am told, heard of it. It was squeezed out of me by a brother parson in her neighbourhood, to accommodate a new Highland reel for the marquis's birth-day, to the stanza of

'Tune your fiddles, tune them sweetly,' &c.

"If this last answer your purpose, you may have it from a brother of mine, Mr James Skinner, writer, in Edinburgh, who, I believe, can give the music too.

"There is another humorous thing, I have heard said to be done by the catholic priest Geddes, and which hit my taste much:

'There was a wee wifeikie, was coming frae the fair,
Had gotten a little drapikie, which bred her meikle care,
It took upo' the wifie's heart, and she began to spew,
And co' the wee wifeikie, I wish I binna fou,
I wish,' &c. &c.

"I have heard of another new composition, by a young ploughman of my acquaintance, that I am vastly pleased with, to the tune of 'The humours of Glen,' which I fear won't do, as the music, I am told, is of Irish original. I have mentioned these,

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* A plan of publishing a complete collection of Scottish songs, &c.

day. I shall be found at Davies, Black Bull inn. I am hurried, as if hunted by fifty devils, else I should go to Greenock; but if you cannot possibly come, write me, if possible, to Glasgow, on Monday; or direct to me at Mossgiel by Mauchline; and name a day and place in Ayrshire, within a fortnight from this date, where I may meet you. I only stay a fortnight in Ayrshire, and return to Edinburgh. I am ever, my dearest friend, yours,

R. B.*

such as they are, to show my readiness to oblige you, and to contribute my mite, if I could, to the patriotic work you have in hand, and which I wish all success to. You have only to notify your mind, and what you want of the above shall be sent you.

"Meantime, while you are thus publicly, I may say, employed, do not sheath your own proper and piercing weapon. From what I have seen of yours already, I am inclined to hope for much good. One lesson of virtue and morality, delivered in your amusing style, and from such as you, will operate more than dozens would do from such as me, who shall be told it is our employment, and be never more minded: whereas, from a pen like yours, as being one of the many, what comes will be admired. Admiration will produce regard, and regard will leave an impression, especially when example goes along.

"Now binna saying I'm ill bred,
Else, by my troth, I'll no be glad;
For cadgers, ye have heard it said,
And sic like fry,
Maun aye be harland in their trade,
And sae maun I.

"Wishing you, from my poet-pen, all success; and, in my other character, all happiness and heavenly direction,

"I remain, with esteem,
"Your sincere friend,
"JOHN SKINNER."

* "The letters to Richard Brown, written at a period when the Poet was in the full blaze of reputation, showed that he was at no time so dazzled with success as to forget the friends who had anticipated the public by discovering his merit."—*Walker.*

No. XCV.

TO MRS ROSE, OF KILRAVOCK.

EDINBURGH, *February 17th*, 1788.

MADAM,

YOU are much indebted to some indispensable business I have had on my hands, otherwise my gratitude threatened such a return for your obliging favour as would have tired your patience. It but poorly expresses my feelings to say, that I am sensible of your kindness: it may be said of hearts such as yours is, and such, I hope, mine is, much more justly than Addison applies it,—

"Some souls by instinct to each other turn."

There was something in my reception at Kilravock so different from the cold, obsequious, dancing school bow of politeness, that it almost got into my head that friendship had occupied her ground without the intermediate march of acquaintance. I wish I could transcribe, or rather transfuse into language, the glow of my heart when I read your letter. My ready fancy, with colours more mellow than life itself, painted the beautifully wild scenery of Kilravock —the venerable grandeur of the castle—the spreading woods—the winding river, gladly leaving his unsightly, heathy source, and lingering with apparent delight as he passes the fairy walk at the bottom of the garden;—your late distressful anxieties—your present enjoyments—your dear little angel, the pride of your hopes;—my aged friend, venerable in worth and years, whose loyalty and other virtues will strongly entitle her to the support of the Almighty Spirit here, and his peculiar favour in a happier state of existence. You cannot imagine, Madam, how much such feelings delight me; they are my dearest proofs of my own immortality. Should I never revisit the north, as probably I never will, nor again see your hospitable mansion, were I, some twenty years hence, to see your

little fellow's name making a proper figure in a newspaper paragraph, my heart would bound with pleasure.

I am assisting a friend in a collection of Scottish songs, set to their proper tunes; every air worth preserving is to be included: among others I have given 'Morag,' and some few Highland airs which pleased me most, a dress which will be more generally known, though far, far inferior in real merit. As a small mark of my grateful esteem, I beg leave to present you with a copy of the work, as far as it is printed; the Man of Feeling, that first of men, has promised to transmit it by the first opportunity.

I beg to be remembered most respectfully to my venerable friend, and to your little Highland chieftain. When you see the "two fair spirits of the hill," at Kildrummie,* tell them that I have done myself the honour of setting myself down as one of their admirers for at least twenty years to come, consequently they must look upon me as an acquaintance for the same period; but, as the Apostle Paul says, "this I ask of grace, not of debt."

I have the honour to be, Madam, &c.

R. B.

No. XCVI.

TO RICHARD BROWN.

MOSSGIEL, 24*th February*, 1788.

MY DEAR SIR,

I CANNOT get the proper direction for my friend in Jamaica, but the following will do:—To Mr Jo. Hutchinson, at Jo. Brownrigg's, Esq., care of Mr Benjamin Henriquez, merchant, Orange-street, Kingston. I arrived here, at my brother's, only yesterday, after fighting my way through Paisley and Kilmarnock, against those old power-

* Miss Sophia Brodie, of L——, and Miss Rose of Kilravock.

ful foes of mine, the devil, the world, and the flesh—so terrible in the fields of dissipation. I have met with few incidents in my life which gave me so much pleasure as meeting you in Glasgow. There is a time of life beyond which we cannot form a tie worth the name of friendship. "O youth! enchanting stage, profusely blest." Life is a fairy scene: almost all that deserves the name of enjoyment or pleasure is only a charming delusion; and in comes repining age, in all the gravity of hoary wisdom, and wretchedly chases away the bewitching phantom. When I think of life, I resolve to keep a strict look-out in the course of economy, for the sake of worldly convenience and independence of mind; to cultivate intimacy with a few of the companions of youth, that they may be the friends of age; never to refuse my liquorish humour a handful of the sweetmeats of life, when they come not too dear; and, for futurity,—

"The present moment is our ain,
The neist we never saw!"

How like you my philosophy? Give my best compliments to Mrs B., and believe me to be,

My dear Sir,

Yours most truly,

R. B.

No. XCVII.

TO MR WILLIAM CRUIKSHANK.

MAUCHLINE, *March* 3*d*, 1788.

MY DEAR SIR,

APOLOGIES for not writing are frequently like apologies for not singing—the apology better than the song. I have fought my way severely through the savage hospitality of this country, to send every guest drunk to bed if they can.

I executed your commission in Glasgow, and I hope the cocoa came safe. 'Twas the same price and the very same

kind as your former parcel, for the gentleman recollected your buying there perfectly well.

I should return my thanks for your hospitality (I leave a blank for the epithet, as I know none can do it justice) to a poor, wayfaring bard, who was spent and almost overpowered fighting with prosaic wickednesses in high places; but I am afraid lest you should burn the letter whenever you come to the passage, so I pass over it in silence. I am just returned from visiting Mr Miller's farm. The friend whom I told you I would take with me was highly pleased with the farm; and as he is, without exception, the most intelligent farmer in the country, he has staggered me a good deal. I have the two plans of life before me; I shall balance them to the best of my judgment; and fix on the most eligible. I have written Mr Miller, and shall wait on him when I come to town, which shall be the beginning or middle of next week: I would be in sooner, but my unlucky knee is rather worse, and I fear for some time will scarcely stand the fatigue of my Excise instructions. I only mention these ideas to you; and, indeed, except Mr Ainslie, whom I intend writing to to-morrow, I will not write at all to Edinburgh till I return to it. I would send my compliments to Mr Nicol, but he would be hurt if he knew I wrote to anybody and not to him: so I shall only beg my best, kindest, kindest compliments to my worthy hostess, and the sweet little rose-bud.

So soon as I am settled in the routine of life, either as an Excise-officer, or as a farmer, I propose myself great pleasure from a regular correspondence with the only man almost I ever saw who joined the most attentive prudence with the warmest generosity.

I am much interested for that best of men, Mr Wood; I hope he is in better health and spirits than when I saw him last.

I am ever,
My dearest friend,
Your obliged, humble servant,
R. B.

No. XCVIII.

TO ROBERT AINSLIE, ESQ.

MAUCHLINE, 3*d March*, 1788.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I AM just returned from Mr Miller's farm. My old friend whom I took with me was highly pleased with the bargain, and advised me to accept of it. He is the most intelligent sensible farmer in the county, and his advice has staggered me a good deal. I have the two plans before me: I shall endeavour to balance them to the best of my judgment, and fix on the most eligible. On the whole, if I find Mr Miller in the same favourable disposition as when I saw him last, I shall in all probability turn farmer.

I have been through sore tribulation and under much buffetting of the wicked one since I came to this country. Jean I found banished, forlorn, destitute, and friendless; I have reconciled her to her fate, and I have reconciled her to her mother.

I shall be in Edinburgh middle of next week. My farming ideas I shall keep private till I see. I got a letter from Clarinda yesterday, and she tells me she has got no letter of mine but one. Tell her that I wrote to her from Glasgow, from Kilmarnock, from Mauchline, and yesterday from Cumnock as I returned from Dumfries. Indeed she is the only person in Edinburgh I have written to till this day. How are your soul and body putting up?—a little like man and wife I suppose.

R. B.

No. XCIX.

TO RICHARD BROWN.

MAUCHLINE, *7th March*, 1788.

I HAVE been out of the country, my dear friend, and have not had an opportunity of writing till now, when I am afraid you will be gone out of the country too. I have been looking at farms, and, after all, perhaps I may settle in the character of a farmer. I have got so vicious a bent to idleness, and have ever been so little a man of business, that it will take no ordinary effort to bring my mind properly into the routine: but you will say a "great effort is worthy of you." I say so myself; and butter up my vanity with all the stimulating compliments I can think of. Men of grave, geometrical minds, the sons of "which was to be demonstrated," may cry up reason as much as they please; but I have always found an honest passion, or native instinct, the truest auxiliary in the warfare of this world. Reason almost always comes to me like an unlucky wife to a poor devil of a husband, just in sufficient time to add her reproaches to his other grievances.

I am gratified with your kind inquiries after Jean; as, after all, I may say with Othello—

> ——————"Excellent wretch!
> Perdition catch my soul, but I do love thee!"

I go for Edinburgh on Monday.

Yours,—R. B.

No. C.

TO MR MUIR.

MOSSGIEL, *7th March*, 1788.

DEAR SIR,

I HAVE partly changed my ideas, my dear friend, since I saw you. I took old Glenconner with me to Mr Miller's

farm, and he was so pleased with it, that I have wrote an offer to Mr Miller, which, if he accepts, I shall sit down a plain farmer, the happiest of lives when a man can live by it. In this case I shall not stay in Edinburgh above a week. I set out on Monday, and would have come by Kilmarnock, but there are several small sums owing me for my first edition about Galston and Newmills, and I shall set off so early as to despatch my business and reach Glasgow by night. When I return, I shall devote a forenoon or two to make some kind of acknowledgment for all the kindness I owe your friendship. Now that I hope to settle with some credit and comfort at home, there was not any friendship or friendly correspondence that promised me more pleasure than yours; I hope I will not be disappointed. I trust the spring will renew your shattered frame, and make your friends happy. You and I have often agreed that life is no great blessing on the whole. The close of life, indeed, to a reasoning age, is,

> "Dark as was chaos, ere the infant sun
> Was roll'd together, or had try'd his beams
> Athwart the gloom profound."

But an honest man has nothing to fear. If we lie down in the grave, the whole man a piece of broken machinery, to moulder with the clods of the valley, be it so; at least there is an end of pain, care, woes and wants: if that part of us called mind does survive the apparent destruction of the man—away with old-wife prejudices and tales! Every age and every nation has had a different set of stories; and as the many are always weak of consequence, they have often, perhaps always, been deceived: a man conscious of having acted an honest part among his fellow-creatures—even granting that he may have been the sport at times of passions and instincts—he goes to a great unknown Being, who could have no other end in giving him existence but to make him happy, who gave him those passions and instincts, and well knows their force.

These, my worthy friend, are my ideas; and I know they

are not far different from yours. It becomes a man of sense to think for himself, particularly in a case where all men are equally interested, and where, indeed, all men are equally in the dark.

Adieu, my dear Sir; God send us a cheerful meeting!

R. B

No. CI.

TO MRS DUNLOP.

MOSSGIEL, 17*th March*, 1788.

MADAM,

THE last paragraph in yours of the 30th February affected me most, so I shall begin my answer where you ended your letter. That I am often a sinner with any little wit I have, I do confess: but I have taxed my recollection to no purpose, to find out when it was employed against you. I hate an ungenerous sarcasm a great deal worse than I do the devil; at least as Milton describes him; and though I may be rascally enough to be sometimes guilty of it myself, I cannot endure it in others. You, my honoured friend, who cannot appear in any light but you are sure of being respectable—you can afford to pass by an occasion to display your wit, because you may depend for fame on your sense; or, if you choose to be silent, you know you can rely on the gratitude of many, and the esteem of all; but, God help us, who are wits or witlings by profession, if we stand not for fame there, we sink unsupported!

I am highly flattered by the news you tell me of Coila. I may say to the fair painter who does me so much honour, as Dr Beattie says to Ross the poet of his muse Scota, from which, by the bye, I took the idea of Coila ('tis a poem of Beattie's in the Scottish dialect, which perhaps you have never seen):—

" Ye shak your head, but o' my fegs,
Ye've set auld Scota on her legs:
Lang had she lien wi' beffs and flegs,
Bumbaz'd and dizzie,
Her fiddle wanted strings and pegs,
Wae's me, poor hizzie."

R. B.

No. CII.

TO MISS CHALMERS.

EDINBURGH, *March 14th*, 1788.

I KNOW, my ever dear friend, that you will be pleased with the news when I tell you, I have at last taken a lease of a farm. Yesternight I completed a bargain with Mr Miller, of Dalswinton, for the farm of Ellisland, on the banks of the Nith, between five and six miles above Dumfries. I begin at Whit-Sunday to build a house, drive lime, &c.; and heaven be my help! for it will take a strong effort to bring my mind into the routine of business. I have discharged all the army of my former pursuits, fancies, and pleasures; a motley host! and have literally and strictly retained only the ideas of a few friends, which I have incorporated into a life-guard. I trust in Dr Johnson's observation, " Where much is attempted, something is done." Firmness, both in sufferance and exertion, is a character I would wish to be thought to possess: and have always despised the whining yelp of complaint, and the cowardly, feeble resolve.

Poor Miss K. is ailing a good deal this winter, and begged me to remember her to you the first time I wrote to you. Surely woman, amiable woman, is often made in vain. Too delicately formed for the rougher pursuits of ambition; too noble for the dirt of avarice, and even too gentle for the rage of pleasure; formed indeed for, and highly susceptible of enjoyment and rapture; but that enjoyment, alas!

almost wholly at the mercy of the caprice, malevolence, stupidity, or wickedness of an animal at all times comparatively unfeeling, and often brutal.

R. B.

No. CIII.

TO RICHARD BROWN.

GLASGOW, *26th March*, 1788.

I AM monstrously to blame, my dear Sir, in not writing to you, and sending you the Directory. I have been getting my tack extended, as I have taken a farm; and I have been racking shop accounts with Mr Creech, both of which, together with watching, fatigue, and a load of care almost too heavy for my shoulders, have in some degree actually fevered me. I really forgot the Directory yesterday, which vexed me; but I was convulsed with rage a great part of the day. I have to thank you for the ingenious, friendly, and elegant epistle from your friend Mr Crawford. I shall certainly write to him, but not now. This is merely a card to you, as I am posting to Dumfries-shire, where many perplexing arrangements await me. I am vexed about the Directory; but, my dear Sir, forgive me: these eight days I have been positively crazed. My compliments to Mrs B. I shall write to you at Grenada.—I am ever, my dearest friend,

Yours,—R. B.

No. CIV.

TO MR ROBERT CLEGHORN.

MAUCHLINE, *31st March* 1788.

YESTERDAY, my dear Sir, as I was riding through a track of melancholy, joyless muirs, between Galloway and Ayr-

shire, it being Sunday, I turned my thoughts to psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs; and your favourite air, 'Captain O'Kean,' coming at length into my head, I tried these words to it. You will see that the first part of the tune must be repeated.

I am tolerably pleased with these verses, but as I have only a sketch of the tune, I leave it with you to try if they suit the measure of the music.

I am so harassed with care and anxiety, about this farming project of mine, that my muse has degenerated into the veriest prose-wench that ever picked cinders, or followed a tinker. When I am fairly got into the routine of business, I shall trouble you with a longer epistle; perhaps with some queries respecting farming; at present, the world sits such a load on my mind that it has effaced almost every trace of the poet in me.

My very best compliments and good wishes to Mrs Cleghorn.

R. B.

No. CV.

TO MISS CHALMERS.

MAUCHLINE, *7th April*, 1788.

I AM indebted to you and Miss Nimmo for letting me know Miss Kennedy. Strange! how apt we are to indulge prejudices in our judgments of one another! Even I, who pique myself on my skill in marking characters—because I am too proud of my character as a man to be dazzled in my judgment for glaring wealth; and too proud of my situation as a poor man to be biassed against squalid poverty—I was unacquainted with Miss K.'s very uncommon worth.

I am going on a good deal progressive in *mon grand bût*, the sober science of life. I have lately made some sacrifices,

for which, were I *vivâ voce* with you to paint the situation and recount the circumstances, you would applaud me.

R. B.

No. CVI.

TO MR WILLIAM DUNBAR, EDINBURGH.

MAUCHLINE, *7th April*, 1788.

I HAVE not delayed so long to write you, my much respected friend, because I thought no farther of my promise. I have long since given up that kind of formal correspondence, where one sits down irksomely to write a letter, because we think we are in duty bound so to do.

I have been roving over the country, as my farm I have taken is forty miles from this place, hiring servants and preparing matters; but most of all, I am earnestly busy to bring about a revolution in my own mind.—As, till within these eighteen months, I never was the wealthy master of ten guineas, my knowledge of business is to learn; add to this, my late scenes of idleness and dissipation have enervated my mind to an alarming degree. Skill in the sober science of life is my most serious and hourly study. I have dropt all conversation and all reading (prose reading) but what tends in some way or other to my serious aim. Except one worthy young fellow, I have not one single correspondent in Edinburgh. You have indeed kindly made me an offer of that kind. The world of wits, and *gens comme il faut* which I lately left, and with whom I never again will intimately mix,—from that port, Sir, I expect your Gazette: what *les beaux esprits* are saying, what they are doing, and what they are singing. Any sober intelligence from my sequestrated walks of life; any droll original; any passing remark, important, forsooth, because it is mine; any little poetic effort, however embryoth; these, my dear Sir, are all you have to expect from me. When I talk of poetic efforts, I must have it always understood, that I appeal from

your wit and taste to your friendship and good nature. The first would be my favourite tribunal, where I defied censure; but the last, where I declined justice.

I have scarcely made a single distich since I saw you. When I meet with an old Scots air that has any facetious idea in its name, I have a peculiar pleasure in following out that idea for a verse or two.

I trust that this will find you in better health than I did last time I called for you. A few lines from you, directed to me, at Mauchline, were it but to let me know how you are, will set my mind a good deal.* Now, never shun the idea of writing me because perhaps you may be out of humour or spirits. I could give you a hundred good consequences attending a dull letter; one, for example, and the remaining ninety nine some other time; it will always serve to keep in countenance, my much respected Sir,

Your obliged friend, and humble servant,

R. B.†

* Something is omitted here, perhaps, "at rest:" but the letter is given as it appears in the original.

† The gentleman to whom the above letter is addressed, and which is for the first time published, was a writer to the Signet in Edinburgh, with whom the poet appears to have been on very intimate and friendly terms. For this and three other letters to the same individual, inserted afterwards, we are indebted to the activity and industry of Mr P. Buchan of Aberdeen, who has been unremitting in his exertions to recover every scrap connected with the name or fame of our national Bard. In his communications to us, Mr Buchan states, that "the four letters referred to belong to Misses Ogilvie, daughters of the late Rev. and ingenious John Ogilvie, D. D. of Midmar, author of the poems on 'Providence,' 'Paradise,' and 'Britannia,' and after having made the tour of part of Europe and America, had again crossed the Atlantic, for the purpose of being first given to the public in this complete edition of Burns' works."—M.

No. CVII.

TO THE SAME.

LAWN-MARKET, *Monday morning.*

DEAR SIR,

IN justice to Spencer, I must acknowledge that there is scarcely a Poet in the language could have been a more agreeable present to me; and in justice to you, allow me to say, Sir, that I have not met with a man in Edinburgh to whom I would so willingly have been indebted for the gift. The tattered rhymes I herewith present you, and the handsome volumes of Spencer for which I am so much indebted to your goodness, may perhaps be not in proportion to one another as do their late author, but be that as it may, my gift, though far less valuable, is as sincere a mark of esteem as yours.

The time is approaching when I shall return to my shades; and I am afraid my numerous Edinburgh friendships are of so tender a construction, that they will not bear carriage with me. Yours is one of the few that I could wish of a more robust constitution. It is indeed very probable that when I leave this city, we part never more to meet in this sublunary sphere; but I have a strong fancy that in some future eccentric planet, the comet of happier systems than any with which astronomy is yet acquainted, you and I, among the harum-scarum sons of imagination and whim, with a hearty shake of a hand, a metaphor and a laugh, shall recognise old acquaintance:

Where wit may sparkle all its rays,
Uncurst with caution's fears;
That pleasure, basking in the blaze,
Rejoice for endless years.

I have the honour to be, with the warmest sincerity,
Dear Sir, &c. R. B.*

* There is no date to the above, and consequently the order in which it is placed may not be quite chronologically correct.—M.

No. CVIII.

TO MISS CHALMERS.

No date.

Now for that wayward, unfortunate thing, myself. I have broke measures with Creech, and last week I wrote him a frosty, keen letter. He replied in terms of chastisement, and promised me upon his honour that I should have the account on Monday; but this is Tuesday, and yet I have not heard a word from him. God have mercy on me! a poor damned, incautious, duped, unfortunate fool! The sport, the miserable victim of rebellious pride, hypochondriac imagination, agonizing sensibility, and bedlam passions!

"I wish that I were dead, but I'm no like to die!" I had lately "a hairbreadth 'scape in th' imminent deadly breach" of love too. Thank my stars I got off heart-whole, "waur fleyd than hurt."—Interruption.

I have this moment got a hint; I fear I am something like—undone—but I hope for the best. Come, stubborn pride and unshrinking resolution; accompany me through this, to me, miserable world! You must not desert me! Your friendship I think I can count on, though I should date my letters from a marching regiment. Early in life, and all my life, I reckoned on a recruiting drum as my forlorn hope. Seriously though, life at present presents me with but a melancholy path: but—my limb will soon be sound, and I shall struggle on.

R. B.

No. CIX.

TO THE SAME.

EDINBURGH, *Sunday.*

To-MORROW, my dear madam, I leave Edinburgh. I have altered all my plans of future life. A farm that I

could live in, I could not find; and, indeed, after the necessary support my brother and the rest of the family required, I could not venture on farming in that style suitable to my feelings. You will condemn me for the next step I have taken. I have entered into the Excise. I stay in the west about three weeks, and then return to Edinburgh for six weeks' instructions; afterwards, for I get employ instantly, I go *où il plait à Dieu,—et mon Roi.* I have chosen this, my dear friend, after mature deliberation. The question is not at what door of fortune's palace shall we enter in; but what doors does she open to us? I was not likely to get any thing to do. I wanted *un bût*, which is a dangerous, an unhappy situation. I got this without any hanging on, or mortifying solicitation; it is immediate bread, and though poor in comparison of the last eighteen months of my existence, 'tis luxury in comparison of all my preceding life: besides, the commissioners are some of them my acquaintances, and all of them my firm friends.

R. B.

No. CX.

TO MRS DUNLOP.

MAUCHLINE, 28*th April*, 1788.

MADAM,

YOUR powers of reprehension must be great indeed, as I assure you they made my heart ache with penitential pangs, even though I was really not guilty. As I commence farmer at Whit-Sunday, you will easily guess I must be pretty busy; but that is not all. As I got the offer of the Excise business without solicitation, and as it costs me only six months' attendance for instructions, to entitle me to a commission—which commission lies by me, and at any future period, on my simple petition, can be resumed—I thought five-and-thirty pounds a-year was no bad dernier resort for a poor poet, if fortune in her jade tricks should kick

him down from the little eminence to which she has lately helped him up.

For this reason, I am at present attending these instructions, to have them completed before Whit-Sunday. Still, Madam, I prepared with the sincerest pleasure to meet you at the Mount, and came to my brother's on Saturday night, to set out on Sunday; but for some nights preceding I had slept in an apartment, where the force of the winds and rains was only mitigated by being sifted through numberless apertures in the windows, walls, &c. In consequence I was on Sunday, Monday, and part of Tuesday, unable to stir out of bed, with all the miserable effects of a violent cold.

You see, Madam, the truth of the French maxim, *le vrai n'est pas toujours le vrai-semblable;* your last was so full of expostulation, and was something so like the language of an offended friend, that I began to tremble for a correspondence, which I had with grateful pleasure set down as one of the greatest enjoyments of my future life.

Your books have delighted me; Virgil, Dryden, and Tasso were all equally strangers to me; but of this more at large in my next.

R. B.

No. CXI.

TO MR JAMES SMITH,

AVON PRINTFIELD, LINLITHGOW.

MAUCHLINE, *April* 28, 1788.

BEWARE of your Strasburgh, my good Sir! Look on this as the opening of a correspondence, like the opening of a twenty-four gun battery!

There is no understanding a man properly, without knowing something of his previous ideas; that is to say, if the

man has any ideas: for I know many who, in the animal-muster, pass for men, that are the scanty masters of only one idea on any given subject, and by far the greatest part of your acquaintances and mine can barely boast of ideas, 1·25—1·5—1·75 (or some such fractional matter); so to let you a little into the secrets of my pericranium, there is, you must know, a certain clean-limbed, handsome, bewitching young hussy of your acquaintance, to whom I have lately and privately given a matrimonial title to my corpus.

"Bode a robe and wear it,
Bode a pock and bear it,"

says the wise old Scots adage! I hate to presage ill-luck; and as my girl has been doubly kinder to me than even the best of women usually are to their partners of our sex, in similar circumstances, I reckon on twelve times a brace of children against I celebrate my twelfth wedding-day: these twenty-four will give me twenty-four gossipings, twenty-four christenings (I mean one equal to two), and I hope, by the blessing of the God of my fathers, to make them twenty-four dutiful children to their parents, twenty-four useful members of society, and twenty-four approved servants of their God! * * *

"Light's heartsome," quo' the wife when she was stealing sheep. You see what a lamp I have hung up to lighten your paths, when you are idle enough to explore the combinations and relations of my ideas. 'Tis now as plain as a pike-staff, why a twenty-four gun battery was a metaphor I could readily employ.

Now for business.—I intend to present Mrs Burns with a printed shawl, an article of which I dare say you have variety: 'tis my first present to her since I have irrevocably called her mine, and I have a kind of whimsical wish to get her the first said present from an old and much valued friend of hers and mine, a trusty Trojan, on whose friendship I count myself possessed of as a life-rent lease.

Look on this letter as a "beginning of sorrows;" I will write you till your eyes ache reading nonsense.

Mrs Burns ('tis only her private designation) begs her best compliments to you.

R. B.

No. CXII.

TO PROFESSOR DUGALD STEWART.

MAUCHLINE, 3*d May*, 1788.

SIR,

I INCLOSE you one or two more of my bagatelles. If the fervent wishes of honest gratitude have any influence with that great, unknown Being who frames the chain of causes and events, prosperity and happiness will attend your visit to the continent, and return you safe to your native shore.

Wherever I am, allow me, Sir, to claim it as my privilege to acquaint you with my progress in my trade of rhymes; as I am sure I could say it with truth, that, next to my little fame, and the having it in my power to make life more comfortable to those whom nature has made dear to me, I shall ever regard your countenance, your patronage, your friendly good offices, as the most valued consequence of my late success in life.

R. B.

No. CXIII.

TO MRS DUNLOP.

MAUCHLINE, 4*th May*, 1788.

MADAM,

DRYDEN'S Virgil has delighted me. I do not know whether the critics will agree with me, but the Georgics

are to me by far the best of Virgil. It is indeed a species of writing entirely new to me; and has filled my head with a thousand fancies of emulation: but, alas! when I read the Georgics, and then survey my own powers, 'tis like the idea of a Shetland pony, drawn up by the side of a thorough-bred hunter, to start for the plate. I own I am disappointed in the Æneid. Faultless correctness may please, and does highly please, the lettered critic: but to that awful character I have not the most distant pretensions. I do not know whether I do not hazard my pretensions to be a critic of any kind, when I say that I think Virgil, in many instances, a servile copier of Homer. If I had the Odyssey by me, I could parallel many passages where Virgil has evidently copied, but by no means improved, Homer. Nor can I think there is any thing of this owing to the translators; for, from every thing I have seen of Dryden, I think him, in genius and fluency of language, Pope's master. I have not perused Tasso enough to form an opinion: in some future letter, you shall have my ideas of him; though I am conscious my criticisms must be very inaccurate and imperfect, as there I have ever felt and lamented my want of learning most.

R. B.

No. CXIV.

TO MR ROBERT AINSLIE.

MAUCHLINE, *May 26th*, 1788.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I AM two kind letters in your debt; but I have been from home, and horridly busy, buying and preparing for my farming business, over and above the plague of my Excise instructions, which this week will finish.

As I flatter my wishes that I foresee many future years'

correspondence between us, 'tis foolish to talk of excusing dull epistles; a dull letter may be a very kind one. I have the pleasure to tell you that I have been extremely fortunate in all my buyings and bargainings hitherto; Mrs Burns not excepted; which title I now avow to the world. I am truly pleased with this last affair: it has indeed added to my anxieties for futurity, but it has given a stability to my mind and resolutions unknown before; and the poor girl has the most sacred enthusiasm of attachment to me, and has not a wish but to gratify my every idea of her deportment. I am interrupted.—Farewell! my dear Sir.

R. B.

No. CXV.

TO MRS DUNLOP.

27th May, 1788.

MADAM,

I HAVE been torturing my philosophy to no purpose, to account for that kind partiality of yours, which has followed me, in my return to the shade of life, with assiduous benevolence. Often did I regret, in the fleeting hours of my late will-o'-wisp appearance, that "here I had no continuing city;" and, but for the consolation of a few solid guineas, could almost lament the time that a momentary acquaintance with wealth and splendour put me so much out of conceit with the sworn companions of my road through life—insignificance and poverty.

There are few circumstances relating to the unequal distribution of the good things of this life that give me more vexation (I mean in what I see around me) than the importance the opulent bestow on their trifling family affairs, compared with the very same things on the contracted scale of a cottage. Last afternoon I had the honour to spend

an hour or two at a good woman's fire-side, where the planks that composed the floor were decorated with a splendid carpet, and the gay table sparkled with silver and china. 'Tis now about term-day, and there has been a revolution among those creatures, who, though in appearance partakers, and equally noble partakers, of the same nature with Madame, are from time to time—their nerves, their sinews, their health, strength, wisdom, experience, genius, time, nay a good part of their very thoughts—sold for months and years, not only to the necessities, the conveniences, but the caprices of the important few. We talked of the insignificant creatures; nay, notwithstanding their general stupidity and rascality, did some of the poor devils the honour to commend them. But light be the turf upon his breast who taught, "Reverence thyself!" We looked down on the unpolished wretches, their impertinent wives and clouterly brats, as the lordly bull does on the little dirty ant-hill, whose puny inhabitants he crushes in the carelessness of his ramble, or tosses in the air in the wantonness of his pride.

R. B.

No. CXVI.

TO THE SAME,

AT MR DUNLOP'S, HADDINGTON.

ELLISLAND, 13*th June*, 1788.

"Where'er I roam, whatever realms I see,
My heart, untravell'd, fondly turns to thee;
Still to my friend it turns with ceaseless pain,
And drags, at each remove, a lengthen'd chain."

GOLDSMITH.

THIS is the second day, my honoured friend, that I have been on my farm. A solitary inmate of an old, smoky

spence ; far from every object I love, or by whom I am beloved ; nor any acquaintance older than yesterday, except Jenny Geddes, the old mare I ride on ; while uncouth cares and novel plans hourly insult my awkward ignorance and bashful inexperience. There is a foggy atmosphere native to my soul in the hour of care ; consequently the dreary objects seem larger than the life. Extreme sensibility, irritated and prejudiced on the gloomy side by a series of misfortunes and disappointments, at that period of my existence when the soul is laying in her cargo of ideas for the voyage of life, is, I believe, the principal cause of this unhappy frame of mind.

> "The valiant, in himself, what can he suffer?
> Or what need he regard his *single* woes?" &c.

Your surmise, Madam, is just ; I am indeed a husband.

* * * * *

To jealousy or infidelity I am an equal stranger. My preservative from the first is the most thorough consciousness of her sentiments of honour, and her attachment to me : my antidote against the last is my long and deep-rooted affection for her.

In housewife matters, of aptness to learn and activity to execute, she is eminently mistress : and during my absence in Nithsdale, she is regularly and constantly apprentice to my mother and sisters in their dairy and other rural business.

The muses must not be offended when I tell them, the concerns of my wife and family will, in my mind, always take the *pas ;* but I assure them their ladyships will ever come next in place.

You are right that a bachelor state would have insured me more friends ; but, from a cause you will easily guess, conscious peace in the enjoyment of my own mind, and unmistrusting confidence in approaching my God, would seldom have been of the number.

I found a once much-loved and still much-loved female,

literally and truly cast out to the mercy of the naked elements; but I enabled her to *purchase* a shelter;—there is no sporting with a fellow-creature's happiness or misery.

The most placid good-nature and sweetness of disposition; a warm heart, gratefully devoted with all its powers to love me; vigorous health and sprightly cheerfulness, set off to the best advantage by a more than commonly handsome figure; these, I think, in a woman, may make a good wife, though she should never have read a page but the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, nor have danced in a brighter assembly than a penny pay-wedding.

R. B.

No. CXVII.

TO MR ROBERT AINSLIE.

ELLISLAND, *June 14th*, 1788.

THIS is now the third day, my dearest Sir, that I have sojourned in these regions; and during these three days you have occupied more of my thoughts than in three weeks preceding: in Ayrshire I have several variations of friendship's compass, here it points invariably to the pole. My farm gives me a good many uncouth cares and anxieties, but I hate the language of complaint. Job, or some one of his friends, says well—"Why should a living man complain?"

I have lately been much mortified with contemplating an unlucky imperfection in the very framing and construction of my soul; namely, a blundering inaccuracy of her olfactory organs in hitting the scent of craft or design in my fellow-creatures. I do not mean any compliment to my ingenuousness, or to hint that the defect is in consequence of the unsuspicious simplicity of conscious truth and honour: I take it to be, in some way or other, an imperfection in the mental sight; or, metaphor apart, some modification of

dulness. In two or three instances lately, I have been most shamefully out.

I have all along, hitherto, in the warfare of life, been bred to arms among the light-horse—the piquet-guards of fancy; a kind of hussars and Highlanders of the brain; but I am firmly resolved to sell out of these giddy battalions, who have no ideas of a battle but fighting the foe, or of a siege but storming the town. Cost what it will, I am determined to buy in among the grave squadrons of heavy-armed thought, or the artillery corps of plodding contrivance.

What books are you reading, or what is the subject of your thoughts, besides the great studies of your profession? You said something about religion in your last. I don't exactly remember what it was, as the letter is in Ayrshire; but I thought it not only prettily said, but nobly thought. You will make a noble fellow if once you were married. I make no reservation of your being well-married: you have so much sense, and knowledge of human nature, that though you may not realize perhaps the ideas of romance, yet you will never be ill-married.

Were it not for the terrors of my ticklish situation respecting provision for a family of children, I am decidedly of opinion that the step I have taken is vastly for my happiness.* As it is, I look to the Excise scheme as a certainty of maintenance; a maintenance!—luxury to what either Mrs Burns or I were born to.

Adieu.—R. B.

* This alluded to his marriage.

No. CXVIII.

TO ROBERT AINSLIE, ESQ.

MAUCHLINE, 23*d June*, 1788.

THIS letter, my dear Sir, is only a business scrap. Mr Miers, profile painter in your town, has executed a profile of Dr Blacklock for me: do me the favour to call for it, and sit to him yourself for me, which put in the same size as the doctor's. The account of both profiles will be fifteen shillings, which I have given to James Connel, our Mauchline carrier, to pay you when you give him the parcel. You must not, my friend, refuse to sit. The time is short; when I sat to Mr Miers, I am sure he did not exceed two minutes. I propose hanging Lord Glencairn, the doctor, and you in trio over my new chimney-piece that is to be.

Adieu.—R. B.

No. CXIX.

TO THE SAME.

ELLISLAND, 30*th June*, 1788.

MY DEAR SIR,

I JUST now received your brief epistle; and, to take vengeance on your laziness, I have, you see, taken a long sheet of writing-paper, and have begun at the top of the page, intending to scribble on to the very last corner.

I am vexed at that affair of the * * *, but dare not enlarge on the subject until you send me your direction, as I suppose that will be altered on your late master and friend's death. I am concerned for the old fellow's exit, only as I fear it may be to your disadvantage in any respect—for an old man's dying, except he have been a very benevolent

character, or in some particular situation of life that the welfare of the poor or the helpless depended on him, I think it an event of the most trifling moment to the world. Man is naturally a kind, benevolent animal, but he is dropped into such a needy situation here in this vexatious world, and has such a whore-son, hungry, growling, multiplying pack of necessities, appetites, passions, and desires about him, ready to devour him for want of other food; that in fact he must lay aside his cares for others that he may look properly to himself. You have been imposed upon in paying Mr Miers for the profile of a Mr H. I did not mention it in my letter to you, nor did I ever give Mr Miers any such order. I have no objection to lose the money, but I will not have any such profile in my possession.

I desired the carrier to pay you, but as I mentioned only 15*s.* to him, I will rather inclose you a guinea-note. I have it not, indeed, to spare here, as I am only a sojourner in a strange land in this place; but in a day or two I return to Mauchline, and there I have the bank-notes through the house like salt permits.

There is a great degree of folly in talking unnecessarily of one's private affairs. I have just now been interrupted by one of my new neighbours, who has made himself absolutely contemptible in my eyes, by his silly, garrulous pruriency. I know it has been a fault of my own, too; but from this moment I abjure it as I would the service of hell! Your poets, spendthrifts, and other fools of that kidney, pretend, forsooth, to crack their jokes on prudence; but 'tis a squalid vagabond glorying in his rags. Still, imprudence respecting money matters is much more pardonable than imprudence respecting character. I have no objection to prefer prodigality to avarice, in some few instances; but I appeal to your observation, if you have not met, and often met, with the same disingenuousness, the same hollow-hearted insincerity, and disintegritive depravity of principle, in the hackneyed victims of profusion, as in the un-

feeling children of parsimony. I have every possible reverence for the much talked-of world beyond the grave, and I wish that which piety believes, and virtue deserves, may be all matter of fact. But in things belonging to, and terminating in this present scene of existence, man has serious and interesting business on hand. Whether a man shall shake hands with welcome in the distinguished elevation of respect, or shrink from contempt in the abject corner of insignificance: whether he shall wanton under the tropic of plenty, at least enjoy himself in the comfortable latitudes of easy convenience, or starve in the arctic circle of dreary poverty; whether he shall rise in the manly consciousness of a self-approving mind, or sink beneath a galling load of regret and remorse—these are alternatives of the last moment.

You see how I preach. You used occasionally to sermonize too; I wish you would, in charity, favour me with a sheet full in your own way. I admire the close of a letter Lord Bolingbroke writes to Dean Swift:—"Adieu, dear Swift! with all thy faults I love thee entirely: make an effort to love me with all mine!" Humble servant, and all that trumpery, is now such a prostituted business, that honest friendship, in her sincere way, must have recourse to her primitive, simple,—farewell!

R. B.

No. CXX.

TO MR GEORGE LOCKHART.

MERCHANT, GLASGOW.

MAUCHLINE, 18*th July*, 1788.

MY DEAR SIR,

I AM just going for Nithsdale, else I would certainly have transcribed some of my rhyming things for you. The

Miss Baillies I have seen in Edinburgh. "Fair and lovely are thy works, Lord God Almighty! Who would not praise thee for these thy gifts in thy goodness to the sons of men!" It needed not your fine taste to admire them. I declare, one day I had the honour of dining at Mr Baillie's, I was almost in the predicament of the children of Israel, when they could not look on Moses' face for the glory that shone in it when he descended from Mount Sinai.

I did once write a poetic address from the Falls of Bruar to his Grace of Athole, when I was in the Highlands. When you return to Scotland, let me know and I will send such of my pieces as please myself best. I return to Mauchline in about ten days.

My compliments to Mr Purden. I am in truth, but at present in haste,

Yours,—R. B.

No. CXXI.

TO MR PETER HILL.

My dear Hill,

I shall say nothing to your mad present—you have so long and often been of important service to me, and I suppose you mean to go on conferring obligations until I shall not be able to lift up my face before you. In the meantime, as Sir Roger de Coverley, because it happened to be a cold day in which he made his will, ordered his servants great-coats for mourning, so, because I have been this week plagued with an indigestion, I have sent you by the carrier a fine old ewe-milk cheese.

Indigestion is the devil: nay, 'tis the devil and all. It besets a man in every one of his senses. I lose my appetite at the sight of successful knavery, and sicken to loathing at the noise and nonsense of self-important folly. When the

hollow-hearted wretch takes me by the hand, the feeling spoils my dinner; the proud man's wine so offends my palate that it chokes me in the gullet; and the *pulvilised*, feathered, pert coxcomb, is so disgustful in my nostril that my stomach turns.

If ever you have any of these disagreeable sensations, let me prescribe for you patience and a bit of my cheese. I know that you are no niggard of your good things among your friends, and some of them are in much need of a slice. There, in my eye, is our friend Smellie; a man positively of the first abilities and greatest strength of mind, as well as one of the best hearts and keenest wits that I have ever met with; when you see him, as, alas! he too is smarting at the pinch of distressful circumstances, aggravated by the sneer of contumelious greatness—a bit of my cheese alone will not cure him, but if you add a tankard of brown stout, and superadd a magnum of right Oporto, you will see his sorrows vanish like the morning mist before the summer sun.

Candlish, the earliest friend, except my only brother, that I have on earth, and one of the worthiest fellows that ever any man called by the name of friend, if a luncheon of my cheese would help to rid him of some of his superabundant modesty, you would do well to give it him.

David,* with his *Courant*, comes, too, across my recollection, and I beg you will help him largely from the said ewe-milk cheese, to enable him to digest those bedaubing paragraphs with which he is eternally larding the lean characters of certain great men in a certain great town. I grant you the periods are very well turned; so, a fresh egg is a very good thing, but when thrown at a man in a pillory, it does not at all improve his figure, not to mention the irreparable loss of the egg.

My facetious friend Dunbar I would wish also to be a partaker: not to digest his spleen, for that he laughs off,

* Printer of the *Edinburgh Evening Courant*.

but to digest his last night's wine at the last field-day of the Crochallan corps.*

Among our common friends I must not forget one of the dearest of them—Cunningham. The brutality, insolence, and selfishness of a world unworthy of having such a fellow as he is in it, I know sticks in his stomach, and if you can help him to any thing that will make him a little easier on that score, it will be very obliging.

As to honest John Sommerville, he is such a contented, happy man, that I know not what can annoy him, except, perhaps, he may not have got the better of a parcel of modest anecdotes which a certain poet gave him one night at supper, the last time the said poet was in town.

Though I have mentioned so many men of law, I shall have nothing to do with them professedly—the faculty are beyond my prescription. As to their clients, that is another thing; God knows they have much to digest!

The clergy I pass by; their profundity of erudition, and their liberality of sentiment; their total want of pride, and their detestation of hypocrisy, are so proverbially notorious as to place them far, far above either my praise or censure.

I was going to mention a man of worth, whom I have the honour to call friend, the Laird of Craigdarroch; but I have spoken to the landlord of the King's-Arms-inn here, to have at the next county meeting a large ewe-milk cheese on the table, for the benefit of the Dumfries-shire Whigs, to enable them to digest the Duke of Queensberry's late political conduct.

I have just this moment an opportunity of a private hand to Edinburgh, as perhaps you would not digest double postage.

R. B.

* A club of choice spirits.

No. CXXII.

TO ROBERT GRAHAM, ESQ.

OF FINTRAY.

SIR,

WHEN I had the honour of being introduced to you at Athole-house, I did not think so soon of asking a favour of you. When Lear, in Shakspeare, asked Old Kent, why he wished to be in his service, he answers, "Because you have that in your face which I would fain call master." For some such reason, Sir, do I now solicit your patronage. You know, I dare say, of an application I lately made to your Board to be admitted an officer of Excise. I have, according to form, been examined by a supervisor, and to-day I gave in his certificate, with a request for an order for instructions. In this affair, if I succeed, I am afraid I shall but too much need a patronizing friend. Propriety of conduct as a man, and fidelity and attention as an officer, I dare engage for; but with any thing like business, except manual labour, I am totally unacquainted.

I had intended to have closed my late appearance on the stage of life, in the character of a country farmer; but, after discharging some filial and fraternal claims, I find I could only fight for existence in that miserable manner, which I have lived to see throw a venerable parent into the jaws of a jail; whence death, the poor man's last and often best friend, rescued him.

I know, Sir, that to need your goodness, is to have a claim on it; may I, therefore, beg your patronage to forward me in this affair, till I be appointed to a division; where, by the help of rigid economy, I will try to support that independence so dear to my soul, but which has been too often so distant from my situation.

R. B.

No. CXXIII.

TO WILLIAM CRUIKSHANKS.

ELLISLAND, *August*, 1788.

I HAVE not room, my dear friend, to answer all the particulars of your last kind letter. I shall be in Edinburgh on some business very soon; and as I shall be two days, or perhaps three, in town, we shall discuss matters *vivâ voce*. My knee, I believe, will never be entirely well: and an unlucky fall this winter has made it still worse. I well remember the circumstance you allude to, respecting Creech's opinion of Mr Nicol; but, as the first gentleman owes me still about fifty pounds, I dare not meddle in the affair.

It gave me a very heavy heart to read such accounts of the consequence of your quarrel with that puritanic, rotten-hearted, hell-commissioned scoundrel, A———. If, notwithstanding your unprecedented industry in public, and your irreproachable conduct in private life, he still has you so much in his power, what ruin may he not bring on some others I could name?

Many and happy returns of seasons to you, with your dearest and worthiest friend, and the lovely little pledge of your happy union. May the great Author of life, and of every enjoyment that can render life delightful, make her that comfortable blessing to you both, which you so ardently wish for, and which, allow me to say, you so well deserve! Glance over the foregoing verses, and let me have your blots.

Adieu.

R. B.

No. CXXIV.

TO MRS DUNLOP.

MAUCHLINE, *August 2d*, 1788.

HONOURED MADAM,

YOUR kind letter welcomed me, yesternight, to Ayrshire. I am, indeed, seriously angry with you at the quantum of your luckpenny; but, vexed and hurt as I was, I could not help laughing very heartily at the noble lord's apology for the missed napkin.

I would write you from Nithsdale, and give you my direction there, but I have scarce an opportunity of calling at a post-office once in a fortnight. I am six miles from Dumfries, am scarcely ever in it myself, and, as yet, have little acquaintance in the neighbourhood. Besides, I am now very busy on my farm, building a dwelling-house; as at present I am almost an evangelical man in Nithsdale, for "I have scarce "where to lay my head."

There are some passages in your last that brought tears in my eyes. "The heart knoweth its own sorrows, and a stranger intermeddleth not therewith." The repository of these "sorrows of the heart" is a kind of *sanctum sanctorum*: and 'tis only a chosen friend, and that, too, at particular, sacred times, who dares enter into them:—

> "Heaven oft tears the bosom-chords
> That nature finest strung."

You will excuse this quotation for the sake of the author. Instead of entering on this subject farther, I shall transcribe you a few lines I wrote in a hermitage, belonging to a gentleman in my Nithsdale neighbourhood. They are almost the only favours the muses have conferred on me in that country:—

> Thou whom chance may hither lead,
> Be thou clad in russet weed,
> Be thou deckt in silken stole,
> 'Grave these maxims on thy soul:—

Life is but a day at most,
Sprung from night, in darkness lost;
Hope not sunshine ev'ry hour;
Fear not clouds will ever lower.
Happiness is but a name,
Make content and ease thy aim.
Ambition is a meteor-gleam;
Fame, an idle restless dream;
Peace, the tend'rest flow'r of spring;
Pleasures, insects on the wing.
Those that sip the dew alone,
Make the butterflies thy own;
Those that would the bloom devour,
Crush the locusts, save the flower.
For the future be prepar'd,
Guard wherever thou canst guard:
But thy utmost duly done,
Welcome what thou canst not shun.
Follies past give thou to air,
Make their consequence thy care:
Keep the name of man in mind,
And dishonour not thy kind.
Reverence with lowly heart
Him whose wondrous work thou art;
Keep his goodness still in view:
Thy trust and thy example too.

Stranger, go! Heaven be thy guide!
Quod the Beadsman of Nith-side.*

Since I am in the way of transcribing, the following were the production of yesterday as I jogged through the wild hills of New Cumnock. I intend inserting them, or something like them, in an epistle I am going to write to the gentleman on whose friendship my Excise hopes depend,

* See Vol. I. p. 184.

Mr Graham of Fintray, one of the worthiest and most accomplished gentlemen, not only of this country, but, I will dare to say it, of this age. The following are just the first crude thoughts "unhousel'd, unanointed, unanneal'd:"—

Pity the tuneful muses' helpless train;
Weak, timid landsmen on life's stormy main:
The world were blest, did bliss on them depend;
Ah, that "the friendly e'er should want a friend!"
The little fate bestows they share as soon;
Unlike sage, proverb'd wisdom's hard-wrung boon.
Let Prudence number o'er each sturdy son,
Who life and wisdom at one race begun;
Who feel by reason and who give by rule;
Instinct's a brute and sentiment a fool!
Who make poor *will do* wait upon *I should;*
We own they're prudent, but who owns they're good?

Ye wise ones, hence! ye hurt the social eye;
God's image rudely etch'd on base alloy!
But come * * * * * * * * *

Here the muse left me. I am astonished at what you tell me of Anthony's writing me. I never received it. Poor fellow! you vex me much by telling me that he is unfortunate. I shall be in Ayrshire ten days from this date. I have just room for an old Roman farewell. R. B.

No. CXXV.

TO THE SAME.

MAUCHLINE, *August 10th*, 1788.

MY MUCH HONOURED FRIEND,

YOURS of the 24th June is before me. I found it, as well as another valued friend—my wife, waiting to welcome me to Ayrshire: I met both with the sincerest pleasure.

When I write you, Madam, I do not sit down to answer every paragraph of yours, by echoing every sentiment, like the faithful Commons of Great Britain in Parliament assembled, answering a speech from the best of kings! I express myself in the fulness of my heart, and may, perhaps, be guilty of neglecting some of your kind inquiries; but not from your very odd reason, that I do not read your letters. All your epistles for several months have cost me nothing, except a swelling throb of gratitude, or a deep-felt sentiment of veneration.

When Mrs Burns, Madam, first found herself "as women wish to be who love their lords," as I loved her nearly to distraction, we took steps for a private marriage. Her parents got the hint; and not only forbade me her company and their house, but, on my rumoured West Indian voyage, got a warrant to put me in jail, till I should find security in my about-to-be paternal relation. You know my lucky reverse of fortune. On my *éclatant* return to Mauchline, I was made very welcome to visit my girl. The usual consequences began to betray her; and, as I was at that time laid up a cripple in Edinburgh, she was turned, literally turned, out of doors, and I wrote to a friend to shelter her till my return, when our marriage was declared. Her happiness or misery were in my hands, and who could trifle with such a deposit?

I can easily fancy a more agreeable companion for my journey of life; but, upon my honour, I have never seen the individual instance.

Circumstanced as I am, I could never have got a female partner for life, who could have entered into my favourite studies, relished my favourite authors, &c., without probably entailing on me at the same time expensive living, fantastic caprice, perhaps apish affectation, with all the other blessed boarding-school acquirements, which (*pardonnez moi, Madame,*) are sometimes to be found among females of the upper ranks, but almost universally pervade the misses of the would-be gentry.

I like your way in your church-yard lucubrations. Thoughts that are the spontaneous result of accidental situations, either respecting health, place, or company, have often a strength, and always an originality, that would in vain be looked for in fancied circumstances and studied paragraphs. For me, I have often thought of keeping a letter, in progression by me, to send you when the sheet was written out. Now I talk of sheets, I must tell you, my reason for writing to you on paper of this kind is my pruriency of writing to you at large. A page of post is on such a dis-social, narrow-minded scale, that I cannot abide it; and double letters, at least in my miscellaneous reverie manner, are a monstrous tax in a close correspondence.

R. B.

No. CXXVI.

TO THE SAME.

ELLISLAND, 16*th August*, 1788.

I AM in a fine disposition, my honoured friend, to send you an elegiac epistle; and want only genius to make it quite Shenstonian:—

> "Why droops my heart with fancied woes forlorn?
> Why sinks my soul beneath each wintry sky?"

My increasing cares in this, as yet, strange country—gloomy conjectures in the dark vista of futurity—consciousness of my own inability for the struggle of the world—my broadened mark to misfortune in a wife and children;—I could indulge these reflections, till my humour should ferment into the most acid chagrin, that would corrode the very thread of life.

To counterwork these baneful feelings, I have sat down to write to you; as I declare upon my soul I always find that the most sovereign balm for my wounded spirit.

I was yesterday at Mr Miller's to dinner, for the first

time. My reception was quite to my mind: from the lady of the house quite flattering. She sometimes hits on a couplet or two, *impromptu*. She repeated one or two to the admiration of all present. My suffrage as a professional man was expected: I for once went agonizing over the belly of my conscience. Pardon me, ye, my adored household gods, independence of spirit, and integrity of soul! In the course of conversation, 'Johnson's Musical Museum,' a collection of Scottish songs with the music, was talked of. We got a song on the harpsichord, beginning,

"Raving winds around her blowing."*

The air was much admired: the lady of the house asked me whose were the words. "Mine, Madam—they are indeed my very best verses;" she took not the smallest notice of them! The old Scottish proverb says well, "king's caff is better than ither folks' corn." I was going to make a New Testament quotation about "casting pearls," but that would be too virulent, for the lady is actually a woman of sense and taste.

After all that has been said on the other side of the question, man is by no means a happy creature. I do not speak of the selected few, favoured by partial heaven, whose souls are tuned to gladness amid riches and honours, and prudence and wisdom. I speak of the neglected many, whose nerves, whose sinews, whose days are sold to the minions of fortune.

If I thought you had never seen it, I would transcribe for you a stanza of an old Scottish ballad, called 'The Life and Age of Man;' beginning thus:

"'Twas in the sixteenth hundred year
Of God and fifty-three
Frae Christ was born, that bought us dear,
As writings testifie."

I had an old grand-uncle, with whom my mother lived a while in her girlish years; the good old man, for such he

* See Vol. II. p. 121.

was, was long blind ere he died, during which time his highest enjoyment was to sit down and cry, while my mother would sing the simple old song of 'The Life and Age of Man.'

It is this way of thinking; it is these melancholy truths, that make religion so precious to the poor, miserable children of men.—If it is a mere phantom, existing only in the heated imagination of enthusiasm,

"What truth on earth so precious as the lie?"

My idle reasonings sometimes make me a little sceptical, but the necessities of my heart always give the cold philosophisings the lie. Who looks for the heart weaned from earth; the soul affianced to her God; the correspondence fixed with heaven; the pious supplication and devout thanksgiving, constant as the vicissitudes of even and morn; who thinks to meet with these in the court, the palace, in the glare of public life? No: to find them in their precious importance and divine efficacy, we must search among the obscure recesses of disappointment, affliction, poverty, and distress.

I am sure, dear Madam, you are now more than pleased with the length of my letters. I return to Ayrshire middle of next week: and it quickens my pace to think that there will be a letter from you waiting me there. I must be here again very soon for my harvest.

R. B.

No. CXXVII.

TO MR BEUGO, ENGRAVER, EDINBURGH.

ELLISLAND, *9th Sept.*, 1788.

MY DEAR SIR,

THERE is not in Edinburgh above the number of the graces whose letters would have given me so much pleasure

as yours of the 3d instant, which only reached me yesternight.

I am here on my farm, busy with my harvest; but for all that most pleasurable part of life called SOCIAL COMMUNICATION, I am here at the very elbow of existence. The only things that are to be found in this country, in any degree of perfection, are stupidity and canting. Prose, they only know in graces, prayers, &c., and the value of these they estimate, as they do their plaiding webs—by the ell! As for the muses, they have as much an idea of a rhinoceros as of a poet. For my old capricious but good-natured hussy of a muse—

> "By banks of Nith I sat and wept
> When Coila I thought on,
> In midst thereof I hung my harp
> The willow trees upon."

I am generally about half my time in Ayrshire with my "darling Jean," and then I, at lucid intervals, throw my horny fist across my be-cobwebbed lyre, much in the same manner as an old wife throws her hand across the spokes of her spinning-wheel.

I will send you the 'Fortunate Shepherdess' as soon as I return to Ayrshire, for there I keep it with other precious treasure. I shall send it by a careful hand, as I would not for any thing it should be mislaid or lost. I do not wish to serve you from any benevolence, or other grave Christian virtue; 'tis purely a selfish gratification of my own feelings whenever I think of you.

If your better functions would give you leisure to write me, I should be extremely happy; that is to say, if you neither keep nor look for a regular correspondence. I hate the idea of being obliged to write a letter. I sometimes write a friend twice a week, at other times once a quarter.

I am exceedingly pleased with your fancy in making the author you mention place a map of Iceland instead of his portrait before his works: 'twas a glorious idea.

Could you conveniently do me one thing?—whenever you

finish any head I should like to have a proof copy of it. I might tell you a long story about your fine genius; but, as what every body knows cannot have escaped you, I shall not say one syllable about it.

R. B.

No. CXXVIII.

TO MISS CHALMERS, EDINBURGH.

ELLISLAND, NEAR DUMFRIES, *Sept.* 16*th*, 1788.

WHERE are you? and how are you? and is Lady Mackenzie recovering her health? for I have had but one solitary letter from you. I will not think you have forgot me, Madam; and, for my part—

> "When thee, Jerusalem, I forget,
> Skill part from my right hand!"

"My heart is not of that rock, nor my soul careless as that sea." I do not make my progress among mankind as a bowl does among its fellows—rolling through the crowd without bearing away any mark or impression, except where they hit in hostile collision.

I am here, driven in with my harvest-folks by bad weather; and as you and your sister once did me the honour of interesting yourselves much *à l'egard de moi*, I sit down to beg the continuation of your goodness. I can truly say that, all the exterior of life apart, I never saw two whose esteem flattered the nobler feelings of my soul—I will not say more, but so much, as Lady Mackenzie and Miss Chalmers. When I think of you—hearts the best, minds the noblest of human kind—unfortunate even in the shades of life—when I think I have met with you, and have lived more of real life with you in eight days than I can do with almost anybody I meet with in eight years—when I think on the improbability of meeting you in this world

again—I could sit down and cry like a child! If ever you honoured me with a place in your esteem, I trust I can now plead more desert. I am secure against that crushing grip of iron poverty, which, alas! is less or more fatal to the native worth and purity of, I fear, the noblest souls; and a late important step in my life has kindly taken me out of the way of those ungrateful iniquities, which, however overlooked in fashionable licence, or varnished in fashionable phrase, are indeed but lighter and deeper shades of VILLANY.

Shortly after my last return to Ayrshire, I married "my Jean." This was not in consequence of the attachment of romance, perhaps; but I had a long and much-loved fellow-creature's happiness or misery in my determination, and I durst not trifle with so important a deposit. Nor have I any cause to repent it. If I have not got polite tattle, modish manners, and fashionable dress, I am not sickened and disgusted with the multiform curse of boarding-school affectation: and I have got the handsomest figure, the sweetest temper, the soundest constitution, and the kindest heart in the county. Mrs Burns believes, as firmly as her creed, that I am *le plus bel esprit, et le plus honnête homme* in the universe; although she scarcely ever in her life, except the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, and the Psalms of David in metre, spent five minutes together on either prose or verse. I must except also from this last a certain late publication of Scots poems, which she has perused very devoutly; and all the ballads in the country, as she has (O the partial lover! you will cry) the finest "wood note wild" I ever heard. I am the more particular in this lady's character, as I know she will henceforth have the honour of a share in your best wishes. She is still at Mauchline, as I am building my house; for this hovel that I shelter in, while occasionally here, is pervious to every blast that blows, and every shower that falls; and I am only preserved from being chilled to death by being suffocated with smoke. I do not find my farm that pennyworth

I was taught to expect, but I believe, in time, it may be a saving bargain. You will be pleased to hear that I have laid aside idle *éclat*, and bind every day after my reapers.

To save me from that horrid situation of at any time going down, in a losing bargain of a farm, to misery, I have taken my Excise instructions, and have my commission in my pocket for any emergency of fortune. If I could set all before your view, whatever disrespect you, in common with the world, have for this business, I know you would approve of my idea.

I will make no apology, dear Madam, for this egotistic detail; I know you and your sister will be interested in every circumstance of it. What signify the silly, idle gewgaws of wealth, or the ideal trumpery of greatness! When fellow-partakers of the same nature fear the same God, have the same benevolence of heart, the same nobleness of soul, the same detestation at every thing dishonest, and the same scorn at every thing unworthy—if they are not in the dependence of absolute beggary, in the name of common sense, are they not EQUALS? And if the bias, the instinctive bias of their souls run the same way, why may they not be FRIENDS?

When I may have an opportunity of sending you this, Heaven only knows. Shenstone says, "When one is confined idle within doors by bad weather, the best antidote against *ennui* is to read the letters of, or write to, one's friends;" in that case then, if the weather continues thus, I may scrawl you half a quire.

I very lately—to wit, since harvest began—wrote a poem, not in imitation, but in the manner, of Pope's Moral Epistles. It is only a short essay, just to try the strength of my Muse's pinion in that way. I will send you a copy of it, when once I have heard from you. I have likewise been laying the foundation of some pretty large poetic works: how the superstructure will come on, I leave to that great maker and marrer of projects—TIME. Johnson's collection of Scots songs is going on in the third volume;

and, of consequence, finds me a consumpt for a great deal of idle metre. One of the most tolerable things I have done in that way is two stanzas I made to an air a musical gentleman of my acquaintance composed for the anniversary of his wedding-day, which happens on the seventh of November. Take it as follows:—

The day returns—my bosom burns—
The blissful day we twa did meet, &c.*

I shall give over this letter for shame. If I should be seized with a scribbling fit, before this goes away, I shall make it another letter; and then you may allow your patience a week's respite between the two. I have not room for more than the old, kind, hearty farewell!

To make some amends, *mes chères Mesdames*, for dragging you on to this second sheet; and to relieve a little the tiresomeness of my unstudied and uncorrectible prose, I shall transcribe you some of my late poetic bagatelles; though I have, these eight or ten months, done very little that way. One day, in a hermitage on the banks of Nith, belonging to a gentleman in my neighbourhood, who is so good as give me a key at pleasure, I wrote as follows; supposing myself the sequestered, venerable inhabitant of the lonely mansion.

LINES WRITTEN IN FRIARS-CARSE HERMITAGE.

Thou whom chance may hither lead,
Be thou clad in russet weed.†

R. B.

* See Vol. II. p. 136. † See Vol. I. p. 184.

No. CXXIX.

TO MR MORISON, MAUCHLINE.

ELLISLAND, *September 22d*, 1788.

MY DEAR SIR,

NECESSITY obliges me to go into my new house even before it be plastered. I will inhabit the one end until the other is finished. About three weeks more, I think, will at farthest be my time, beyond which I cannot stay in this present house. If ever you wish to deserve the blessing of him that was ready to perish; if ever you were in a situation that a little kindness would have rescued you from many evils; if ever you hope to find rest in future states of untried being—get these matters of mine ready. My servant will be out in the beginning of next week for the clock. My compliments to Mrs Morison.

I am, after all my tribulation,
Dear Sir, yours,—R. B.*

No. CXXX.

TO MRS DUNLOP, OF DUNLOP.

MAUCHLINE, *27th Sept.*, 1788.

I HAVE received twins, dear Madam, more than once; but scarcely ever with more pleasure than when I received yours of the 12th instant. To make myself understood; I had wrote to Mr Graham, inclosing my poem addressed to him, and the same post which favoured me with yours brought me an answer from him. It was dated the very day he had received mine; and I am quite at a loss to say whether it was most polite or kind.

* Morison was by trade a wright in Mauchline, and the letter refers to chairs and other articles of furniture which the Poet had ordered.—M.

Your criticisms, my honoured benefactress, are truly the work of a friend. They are not the blasting depredations of a canker-toothed, caterpillar critic; nor are they the fair statement of cold impartiality, balancing with unfeeling exactitude the *pro* and *con* of an author's merits; they are the judicious observations of animated friendship, selecting the beauties of the piece. I am just arrived from Nithsdale, and will be here a fortnight. I was on horseback this morning by three o'clock; for between my wife and my farm is just forty-six miles. As I jogged on in the dark, I was taken with a poetic fit, as follows:

"Mrs Ferguson of Craigdarroch's lamentation for the death of her son; an uncommonly promising youth of eighteen or nineteen years of age.

"Fate gave the word—the arrow sped,
And pierced my darling's heart."*

You will not send me your poetic rambles, but, you see, I am no niggard of mine. I am sure your impromptus give me double pleasure; what falls from your pen can neither be unentertaining in itself, nor indifferent to me.

The one fault you found is just; but I cannot please myself in an emendation.

What a life of solicitude is the life of a parent! You interested me much in your young couple.

I would not take my folio paper for this epistle, and now I repent it. I am so jaded with my dirty long journey that I was afraid to drawl into the essence of dulness with any thing larger than a quarto, and so I must leave out another rhyme of this morning's manufacture.

I will pay the sapientipotent George most cheerfully, to hear from you ere I leave Ayrshire.

R. B.†

* See Vol. II. p. 140.

† From a letter which is printed in Dr Currie's collection, it appears that Burns entertained no great respect for what may be styled technical criticism. He loved the man who judged of poetical compositions from the heart—but looked with an evil

No. CXXXI.

TO MR PETER HILL.

MAUCHLINE, 1*st October*, 1788.

I HAVE been here in this country about three days, and all that time my chief reading has been the 'Address to Lochlomond' you were so obliging as to send to me. Were I impannelled one of the author's jury, to determine his criminality respecting the sin of poesy, my verdict should be "guilty! A poet of nature's making!" It is an excellent method for improvement, and what I believe every poet does, to place some favourite classic author in his own walks of study and composition, before him, as a model. Though your author had not mentioned the name, I could have, at half a glance, guessed his model to be Thomson. Will my brother-poet forgive me, if I venture to hint that his imitation of that immortal bard is in two or three places rather more servile than such a genius as his required:—*e. g.*

eye upon those who decided by the cold decisions of the head. This is evinced by the following anecdote.

At a private breakfast, in a literary circle at Edinburgh, to which he was invited, the conversation turned on the poetical merit and pathos of Gray's Elegy,—a poem of which he was enthusiastically fond. A clergyman present, remarkable for his love of paradox, and for his eccentric notions on every subject, distinguished himself by an injudicious and ill-timed attack on this exquisite poem, which Burns, with a generous warmth for the reputation of Gray, manfully defended. As this gentleman's remarks were rather general than specific, Burns urged him to bring forward the passages which he thought exceptionable. He made several attempts to quote the poem, but always in a blundering, inaccurate manner. Burns bore all this for a considerable time with his usual good-nature and forbearance, till, at length, goaded by the fastidious criticisms and wretched quibblings of his opponent, he roused himself, and with an eye flashing contempt and indignation, and with great vehemence of gesticulation, he thus addressed the cold critic: "Sir,—I now perceive a man may be an excellent judge of poetry by *square and rule*, and after all be a d——d blockhead!"—*Cromek.*

"To soothe the maddening passions all to peace."
ADDRESS.
"To soothe the throbbing passions into peace."
THOMSON.

I think the 'Address' is in simplicity, harmony, and elegance of versification, fully equal to the 'Seasons.' Like Thomson, too, he has looked into nature for himself: you meet with no copied description. One particular criticism I made at first reading; in no one instance has he said too much. He never flags in his progress, but, like a true poet of nature's making, kindles in his course. His beginning is simple and modest, as if distrustful of the strength of his pinion; only, I do not altogether like—

——————————"Truth,
The soul of every song that's nobly great."

Fiction is the soul of many a song that is nobly great. Perhaps I am wrong: this may be but a prose criticism. Is not the phrase, in line 7, page 6, "Great lake," too much vulgarized by every-day language for so sublime a poem?

"Great mass of waters, theme for nobler song,"

is perhaps no emendation. His enumeration of a comparison with other lakes is at once harmonious and poetic. Every reader's ideas must sweep the

"Winding margin of an hundred miles."

The perspective that follows mountains blue—the imprisoned billows beating in vain—the wooded isles—the digression on the yew-tree—"Benlomond's lofty, cloud-envelop'd head," &c. are beautiful. A thunder-storm is a subject which has been often tried, yet our poet in his grand picture has interjected a circumstance, so far as I know, entirely original:—

——————————"the gloom
Deep seam'd with frequent streaks of moving fire."

In his preface to the Storm, "the glens how dark between," is noble highland landscape! The "rain plough-

ing the red mould," too, is beautifully fancied. "Benlomond's lofty, pathless top," is a good expression; and the surrounding view from it is truly great: the

——"silver mist,
Beneath the beaming sun,"

is well described; and here he has contrived to enliven his poem with a little of that passion which bids fair, I think, to usurp the modern muses altogether. I know not how far this episode is a beauty upon the whole, but the swain's wish to carry "some faint idea of the vision bright," to entertain her "partial listening ear," is a pretty thought. But, in my opinion, the most beautiful passages in the whole poem are the fowls crowding, in wintry frosts, to Lochlomond's "hospitable flood;" their wheeling round, their lighting, mixing, diving, &c.; and the glorious description of the sportsman. This last is equal to any thing in the 'Seasons.' The idea of "the floating tribes distant seen, far glistering to the moon," provoking his eye as he is obliged to leave them, is a noble ray of poetic genius. "The howling winds," the "hideous roar" of "the white cascades," are all in the same style.

I forget that while I am thus holding forth with the heedless warmth of an enthusiast, I am perhaps tiring you with nonsense. I must, however, mention that the last verse of the sixteenth page is one of the most elegant compliments I have ever seen. I must likewise notice that beautiful paragraph beginning "The gleaming lake," &c. I dare not go into the particular beauties of the last two paragraphs, but they are admirably fine, and truly Ossianic.

I must beg your pardon for this lengthened scrawl. I had no idea of it when I began—I should like to know who the author is; but, whoever he be, please present him with my grateful thanks for the entertainment he has afforded me.

A friend of mine desired me to commission for him two books, 'Letters on the Religion essential to Man,' a book you sent me before; and 'The World Unmasked, or the Philosopher the greatest Cheat.' Send me them by the

first opportunity. The Bible you sent me is truly elegant; I only wish it had been in two volumes.

R. B.*

No. CXXXII.

TO THE EDITOR OF 'THE STAR.'†

November 8th, 1788.

SIR,

NOTWITHSTANDING the opprobrious epithets with which some of our philosophers and gloomy sectarians have branded our nature—the principle of universal selfishness, the proneness to all evil, they have given us; still, the detestation in which inhumanity to the distressed, or insolence to the fallen, are held by all mankind, shows that they are not natives of the human heart. Even the unhappy partner of our kind who is undone, the bitter consequence of his follies or his crimes, who but sympathizes with the miseries

* The poem, entitled 'An Address to Lochlomond,' is said to be written by a gentleman, now one of the masters of the High-school at Edinburgh, and the same who translated the beautiful story of the 'Paria,' as published in the 'Bee' of Dr Anderson. —*Currie.*

† This letter, says Dr Currie, was sent to the publisher of some newspaper, probably the publisher of the Edinburgh Evening Courant; but Mr Cunningham alleges that it was despatched to the editor of the 'London Star.' "One of the conductors of the 'London Star,'" says he, "at that period, and for many years afterwards, was John Mayne, a warm-hearted Dumfriesian, and author of 'Logan braes,' and a lyric more touching still, 'The Muffled Drum.' His poem of 'Glasgow' has been several times reprinted, and his 'Siller Gun' is about to come out in a fourth edition with notes and embellishments." Thus far Mr Cunningham, who, from his local knowledge of Dumfries, and personal acquaintance with Mr Mayne, has every chance of being right in stating that it was sent to the 'London Star.'

The preacher alluded to in the above letter, says the same authority, was "Mr Kirkpatrick, a man equally stern and worthy. He got a harmonious call to a parish with a smaller stipend than Dunscore, and he accepted it."—M.

of this ruined profligate brother? We forget the injuries, and feel for the man.

I went, last Wednesday, to my parish church, most cordially to join in grateful acknowledgment to the AUTHOR OF ALL GOOD, for the consequent blessings of the glorious Revolution. To that auspicious event we owe no less than our liberties, civil and religious; to it we are likewise indebted for the present Royal Family, the ruling features of whose administration have ever been mildness to the subject, and tenderness of his rights.

Bred and educated in revolution principles, the principles of reason and common sense, it could not be any silly political prejudice which made my heart revolt at the harsh, abusive manner in which the reverend gentleman mentioned the House of Stuart, and which, I am afraid, was too much the language of the day. We may rejoice sufficiently in our deliverance from past evils, without cruelly raking up the ashes of those whose misfortune it was, perhaps as much as their crime, to be the authors of those evils; and we may bless GOD for all his goodness to us as a nation, without, at the same time, cursing a few ruined, powerless exiles, who only harboured ideas, and made attempts, that most of us would have done, had we been in their situation.

"The bloody and tyrannical House of Stuart" may be said with propriety and justice, when compared with the present royal family, and the sentiments of our days; but is there no allowance to be made for the manners of the times? Were the royal contemporaries of the Stuarts more attentive to their subjects' rights? Might not the epithets of "bloody and tyrannical" be, with at least equal justice, applied to the House of Tudor, of York, or any other of their predecessors?

The simple state of the case, Sir, seems to be this:—At that period, the science of government, the knowledge of the true relation between king and subject, was, like other sciences and other knowledge, just in its infancy, emerging from dark ages of ignorance and barbarity.

The Stuarts only contended for prerogatives which they knew their predecessors enjoyed, and which they saw their contemporaries enjoying; but these prerogatives were inimical to the happiness of a nation and the rights of subjects.

In this contest between prince and people, the consequence of that light of science which had lately dawned over Europe, the monarch of France, for example, was victorious over the struggling liberties of his people: with us, luckily, the monarch failed, and his unwarrantable pretensions fell a sacrifice to our rights and happiness. Whether it was owing to the wisdom of leading individuals, or to the justling of parties, I cannot pretend to determine; but, likewise, happily for us, the kingly power was shifted into another branch of the family, who, as they owed the throne solely to the call of a free people, could claim nothing inconsistent with the covenanted terms which placed them there.

The Stuarts have been condemned and laughed at for the folly and impracticability of their attempts in 1715 and 1745. That they failed, I bless GOD; but cannot join in the ridicule against them. Who does not know that the abilities or defects of leaders and commanders are often hidden until put to the touchstone of exigency; and that there is a caprice of fortune, an omnipotence in particular accidents and conjunctures of circumstances, which exalt us as heroes, or brand us as madmen, just as they are for or against us?

Man, Mr Publisher, is a strange, weak, inconsistent being: who would believe, Sir, that in this our Augustan age of liberality and refinement, while we seem so justly sensible and jealous of our rights and liberties, and animated with such indignation against the very memory of those who would have subverted them—that a certain people under our national protection should complain, not against our monarch and a few favourite advisers, but against our WHOLE LEGISLATIVE BODY, for similar oppression, and al-

most in the very same terms, as our forefathers did of the House of Stuart! I will not, I cannot, enter into the merits of the cause; but I dare say the American Congress, in 1776, will be allowed to be as able and as enlightened as the English Convention was in 1688; and that their posterity will celebrate the centenary of their deliverance from us, as duly and sincerely as we do ours from the oppressive measures of the wrong-headed House of Stuart.

To conclude, Sir; let every man who has a tear for the many miseries incident to humanity, feel for a family illustrious as any in Europe, and unfortunate beyond historic precedent; and let every Briton (and particularly every Scotsman), who ever looked with reverential pity on the dotage of a parent, cast a veil over the fatal mistakes of the kings of his forefathers.

R. B.

No. CXXXIII.

TO MRS DUNLOP, AT MOREHAM MAINS.

MAUCHLINE, 13*th November*, 1788.

MADAM,

I HAD the very great pleasure of dining at Dunlop yesterday. Men are said to flatter women because they are weak, if it is so, poets must be weaker still; for Misses R. and K. and Miss G. M'K. with their flattering attentions, and artful compliments, absolutely turned my head. I own they did not lard me over as many a poet does his patron, but they so intoxicated me with their sly insinuations and delicate inuendos of compliment, that if it had not been for a lucky recollection, how much additional weight and lustre your good opinion and friendship must give me in that circle, I had certainly looked upon myself as a person of no small consequence. I dare not say one word how much I

was charmed with the Major's friendly welcome, elegant manner, and acute remark, lest I should be thought to balance my orientalisms of applause over-against the finest quey* in Ayrshire, which he made me a present of to help and adorn my farm-stock. As it was on hallow-day, I am determined annually as that day returns, to decorate her horns with an ode of gratitude to the family of Dunlop.

So soon as I know of your arrival at Dunlop, I will take the first conveniency to dedicate a day, or perhaps two, to you and friendship, under the guarantee of the Major's hospitality. There will soon be three score and ten miles of permanent distance between us; and now that your friendship and friendly correspondence is entwisted with the heart-strings of my enjoyment of life, I must indulge myself in a happy day of "The feast of reason and the flow of soul."

R. B.

No. CXXXIV.

TO MR JAMES JOHNSON, ENGRAVER.

MAUCHLINE, *November 15th*, 1788.

MY DEAR SIR,

I HAVE sent you two more songs. If you have got any tunes, or any thing to correct, please send them by return of the carrier.

I can easily see, my dear friend, that you will very probably have four volumes. Perhaps you may not find your account lucratively in this business; but you are a patriot for the music of your country; and I am certain posterity will look on themselves as highly indebted to your public spirit. Be not in a hurry; let us go on correctly, and your name shall be immortal.

* Heifer.

I am preparing a flaming preface for your third volume. I see every day new musical publications advertised; but what are they? Gaudy, hunted butterflies of a day, and then vanish for ever: but your work will outlive the momentary neglects of idle fashion, and defy the teeth of time.

Have you never a fair goddess that leads you a wild-goose chase of amorous devotion? Let me know a few of her qualities, such as whether she be rather black, or fair; plump, or thin; short, or tall, &c.; and choose your air, and I shall task my muse to celebrate her.

R. B.

No. CXXXV.

TO DR BLACKLOCK.*

MAUCHLINE, *November 15th*, 1788.

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,

As I hear nothing of your motions, but that you are, or were, out of town, I do not know where this may find you,

* Gratefully alluding to the Doctor's introduction of him to the literary circles of Edinburgh,—"There was, perhaps, never one among all mankind," says Heron, in a spirited memoir of our Bard, inserted in the Edinburgh Magazine, "whom you might more truly have called an angel upon earth, than Dr Blacklock: he was guileless and innocent as a child, yet endowed with manly sagacity and penetration; his heart was a perpetual spring of overflowing benignity; his feelings were all tremblingly alive to the sense of the sublime, the beautiful, the tender, the pious, the virtuous:—poetry was to him the dear solace of perpetual blindness; cheerfulness, even to gaiety, was, notwithstanding that irremediable misfortune, long the predominant colour of his mind. In his latter years, when the gloom might otherwise have thickened around him, hope, faith, devotion the most fervent and sublime, exalted his mind to heaven, and made him maintain his wonted cheerfulness in the expectation of a speedy dissolution."

In the beginning of the winter of 1786-87, Burns came to

or whether it will find you at all. I wrote you a long letter, dated from the land of matrimony, in June; but either it had not found you, or, what I dread more, it found you or Mrs Blacklock in too precarious a state of health and spirits to take notice of an idle packet.

I have done many little things for Johnson, since I had the pleasure of seeing you; and I have finished one piece, in the way of Pope's 'Moral Epistles;' but, from your silence, I have every thing to fear, so I have only sent you two melancholy things, which I tremble lest they should too well suit the tone of your present feelings.

In a fortnight I move, bag and baggage, to Nithsdale; till then, my direction is at this place; after that period, it will be at Ellisland, near Dumfries. It would extremely oblige me were it but half a line, to let me know how you are, and where you are. Can I be indifferent to the fate of a man to whom I owe so much? A man whom I not only esteem, but venerate.

My warmest good wishes and most respectful compliments to Mrs Blacklock, and Miss Johnston, if she is with you.

I cannot conclude without telling you that I am more and more pleased with the step I took respecting "my Jean." Two things, from my happy experience, I set down as apophthegms in life. A wife's head is immaterial, compared with her heart; and—"Virtue's (for wisdom what poet pretends to it?) ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." Adieu! R. B.

[Here follow 'The mother's lament for the loss of her son, and the song beginning "The lazy mist hangs from the brow of the hill." See Vol. II. pp. 140. and 137.]

Edinburgh: by Dr B. he was received with the most flattering kindness; and was earnestly introduced to every person of taste and generosity among the good old man's friends. It was little Blacklock had in his power to do for a brother poet—but that little he did with a fond alacrity, and with a modest grace.—*Cromek.*

No. CXXXVI.

TO MRS DUNLOP.

ELLISLAND, 17*th December*, 1788.

MY DEAR HONOURED FRIEND,

YOURS, dated Edinburgh, which I have just read, makes me very unhappy. "Almost blind and wholly deaf," are melancholy news of human nature; but when told of a much-loved and honoured friend, they carry misery in the sound. Goodness on your part, and gratitude on mine, began a tie which has gradually entwisted itself among the dearest chords of my bosom, and I tremble at the omens of your late and present ailing habit and shattered health. You miscalculate matters widely, when you forbid my waiting on you, lest it should hurt my worldly concerns. My small scale of farming is exceedingly more simple and easy than what you have lately seen at Moreham Mains. But, be that as it may, the heart of the man and the fancy of the poet are the two grand considerations for which I live: if miry ridges and dirty dunghills are to engross the best part of the functions of my soul immortal, I had better been a rook or a magpie at once, and then I should not have been plagued with any ideas superior to breaking of clods and picking up grubs; not to mention barn-door cocks or mallards, creatures with which I could almost exchange lives at any time. If you continue so deaf, I am afraid a visit will be no great pleasure to either of us; but if I hear you are got so well again as to be able to relish conversation, look you to it, Madam, for I will make my threatenings good. I am to be at the New-year-day fair of Ayr; and, by all that is sacred in the world, friend, I will come and see you.

Your meeting, which you so well describe, with your old schoolfellow and friend, was truly interesting. Out upon the ways of the world!—They spoil these "social offsprings

of the heart." Two veterans of the "men of the world" would have met with little more heart-workings than two old hacks worn out on the road. Apropos, is not the Scotch phrase, 'Auld lang syne,' exceedingly expressive? There is an old song and tune which has often thrilled through my soul. You know I am an enthusiast in old Scotch songs. I shall give you the verses on the other sheet, as I suppose Mr Ker will save you the postage.

"Should auld acquaintance be forgot?"*

Light be the turf on the breast of the Heaven-inspired poet who composed this glorious fragment!† There is more of the fire of native genius in it than in half a dozen of modern English Bacchanalians! Now I am on my hobby-horse, I cannot help inserting two other old stanzas, which please me mightily:—

Go fetch to me a pint o' wine,
And fill it in a silver tassie;
That I may drink, before I go,
A service to my bonnie lassie:
The boat rocks at the pier o' Leith;
Fu' loud the wind blaws frae the ferry,
The ship rides by the Berwick-law,
And I maun lea'e my bonnie Mary.

The trumpets sound, the banners fly,
The glittering spears are ranked ready:
The shouts o' war are heard afar,
The battle closes thick and bloody:
But it's not the roar o' sea or shore,
Wad make me langer wish to tarry;
Nor shouts o' war that's heard afar,
It's leaving thee, my bonnie Mary.

R. B.

* See Vol. III. p. 137.

† In allusion to the song mentioned, the Ettrick Shepherd exclaims:—"So this is a fragment of an old song! I wish there had never been any more forgers of old songs in the world, but Chatterton and Allan Cunningham. It is a thankless, profitless business; for after a man has forged a hundred or two, the public take him at his word, and claim them as public property."—M.

No. CXXXVII.

TO MISS DAVIES.

December, 1788.

MADAM,

I UNDERSTAND my very worthy neighbour, Mr Riddel, has informed you that I have made you the subject of some verses. There is something so provoking in the idea of being the burthen of a ballad, that I do not think Job or Moses, though such patterns of patience and meekness, could have resisted the curiosity to know what that ballad was: so my worthy friend has done me a mischief, which I dare say he never intended; and reduced me to the unfortunate alternative of leaving your curiosity ungratified, or else disgusting you with foolish verses, the unfinished production of a random moment, and never meant to have met your ear. I have heard or read somewhere of a gentleman who had some genius, much eccentricity, and very considerable dexterity with his pencil. In the accidental group of life into which one is thrown, wherever this gentleman met with a character in a more than ordinary degree congenial to his heart, he used to steal a sketch of the face, merely, he said, as a *nota bene*, to point out the agreeable recollection to his memory. What this gentleman's pencil was to him, my muse is to me; and the verses I do myself the honour to send you are a *memento* exactly of the same kind that he indulged in.

It may be more owing to the fastidiousness of my caprice than the delicacy of my taste; but I am so often tired, disgusted, and hurt with the insipidity, affectation, and pride of mankind, that when I meet with a person "after my own heart," I positively feel what an orthodox Protestant would call a species of idolatry, which acts on my fancy like inspiration; and I can no more desist rhyming on the impulse, than an Æolian harp can refuse its tones to the streaming air. A distich or two would be the consequence,

though the object which hit my fancy were gray-bearded age; but where my theme is youth and beauty, a young lady whose personal charms, wit, and sentiment are equally striking and unaffected—by heavens! though I had lived three score years a married man, and three score years before I was a married man, my imagination would hallow the very idea: and I am truly sorry that the inclosed stanzas have done such poor justice to such a subject.

R. B.

No. CXXXVIII.

TO MR JOHN TENNANT.

December 22d, 1788.

I YESTERDAY tried my cask of whisky for the first time, and I assure you it does you great credit. It will bear five waters, strong; or six, ordinary toddy. The whisky of this country is a most rascally liquor; and, by consequence, only drunk by the most rascally part of the inhabitants. I am persuaded, if you once get a footing here, you might do a great deal of business, in the way of consumpt; and should you commence distiller again, this is the native barley country. I am ignorant if, in your present way of dealing, you would think it worth your while to extend your business so far as this country side. I write you this on the account of an accident, which I must take the merit of having partly designed to. A neighbour of mine, a John Currie, miller in Carse-mill—a man who is, in a word, a "very" good man, even for a £500 bargain—he and his wife were in my house the time I broke open the cask. They keep a country public-house and sell a great deal of foreign spirits, but all along thought that whisky would have degraded this house. They were perfectly astonished at my whisky, both for its taste and strength; and, by their desire, I write you to know if you could supply them with

liquor of an equal quality, and what price. Please write me by first post, and direct to me at Ellisland, near Dumfries. If you could take a jaunt this way yourself, I have a spare spoon, knife, and fork, very much at your service. My compliments to Mrs Tennant, and all the good folks in Glenconnel and Barguharrie.

R. B.

No. CXXXIX.

TO MRS DUNLOP.

ELLISLAND, *New-year-day Morning*, 1789.

THIS, dear Madam, is a morning of wishes, and would to God that I came under the apostle James's description!—*the prayer of a righteous man availeth much.* In that case, Madam, you should welcome in a year full of blessings: every thing that obstructs or disturbs tranquillity and self-enjoyment, should be removed, and every pleasure that frail humanity can taste, should be yours. I own myself so little a Presbyterian, that I approve of set times and seasons of more than ordinary acts of devotion, for breaking in on that habituated routine of life and thought, which is so apt to reduce our existence to a kind of instinct, or even sometimes, and with some minds, to a state very little superior to mere machinery.

This day; the first Sunday of May; a breezy, blue-skyed noon some time about the beginning, and a hoary morning and calm sunny day about the end, of autumn; these, time out of mind, have been with me a kind of holiday.

I believe I owe this to that glorious paper in the Spectator, 'The Vision of Mirza,' a piece that struck my young fancy before I was capable of fixing an idea to a word of three syllables: "On the 5th day of the moon, which, according to the custom of my fore-fathers, I always

keep holy, after having washed myself, and offered up my morning devotions, I ascended the high hill of Bagdat, in order to pass the rest of the day in meditation and prayer."

We know nothing, or next to nothing, of the substance or structure of our souls, so cannot account for those seeming caprices in them, that one should be particularly pleased with this thing, or struck with that, which, on minds of a different cast, makes no extraordinary impression. I have some favourite flowers in spring, among which are the mountain-daisy, the hare-bell, the fox-glove, the wild brier-rose, the budding birch, and the hoary hawthorn, that I view and hang over with particular delight. I never hear the loud, solitary whistle of the curlew in a summer noon, or the wild mixing cadence of a troop of grey plovers, in an autumnal morning, without feeling an elevation of soul like the enthusiasm of devotion or poetry. Tell me, my dear friend, to what can this be owing? Are we a piece of machinery, which, like the Æolian harp, passive, takes the impression of the passing accident? Or do these workings argue something within us above the trodden clod? I own myself partial to such proofs of those awful and important realities—a God that made all things—man's immaterial and immortal nature—and a world of weal or woe beyond death and the grave.

R. B.*

* This is a beautiful letter, and abounds in many pious and poetical sentiments. His brother Gilbert's letter, written in the same day, proves how well the whole family were trained up to religious reflection.

"Mossgiel, 1*st Jan.* 1789.

"Dear Brother,—I have just finished my new year's-day breakfast in the usual form, which naturally makes me call to mind the days of former years, and the society in which we used to begin them; and when I look at our family vicissitudes, 'through the dark postern of time long elapsed,' I cannot help remarking to you, my dear brother, how good the God of Seasons is to us, and that, however some clouds may seem to lower over the portion of time before us, we have great reason to hope that all will turn out well.

No. CXL.

TO DR MOORE.*

ELLISLAND, *4th Jan.*, 1789.

SIR,

As often as I think of writing to you, which has been three or four times every week these six months, it gives me something so like the idea of an ordinary-sized statue offering at a conversation with the Rhodian colossus, that my mind misgives me, and the affair always miscarries somewhere between purpose and resolve. I have at last got some business with you, and business letters are written by the style-book. I say my business is with you, Sir, for you never had any with me, except the business that benevolence has in the mansion of poverty.

The character and employment of a poet were formerly my pleasure, but are now my pride. I know that a very great deal of my late eclat was owing to the singularity of my situation, and the honest prejudice of Scotsmen; but still, as I said in the preface to my first edition, I do look upon myself as having some pretensions from Nature to the poetic character. I have not a doubt but the knack, the aptitude, to learn the muses' trade, is a gift bestowed by Him "who forms the secret bias of the soul;"—but I as firmly believe, that *excellence* in the profession is the fruit of industry, labour, attention, and pains. At least I am

"Your mother and sisters, with Robert the second, join me in the compliments of the season to you and Mrs Burns, and beg you will remember us in the same manner to William, the first time you see him.

"I am, dear brother, yours,
"GILBERT BURNS."

* In this communication Burns states pretty specifically all that he realized from the Edinburgh edition of his poems, as well as mentions the advances he had to make for his brother and the other members of his father's family, so highly creditable to the goodness and generosity of the Poet's heart.—M.

resolved to try my doctrine by the test of experience. Another appearance from the press I put off to a very distant day, a day that may never arrive—but poesy I am determined to prosecute with all my vigour. Nature has given very few, if any, of the profession, the talents of shining in every species of composition. I shall try (for until trial it is impossible to know) whether she has qualified me to shine in any one. The worst of it is, by the time one has finished a piece, it has been so often viewed and reviewed before the mental eye, that one loses in a good measure the powers of critical discrimination. Here the best criterion I know is a friend—not only of abilities to judge, but with good-nature enough, like a prudent teacher with a young learner, to praise perhaps a little more than is exactly just, lest the thin-skinned animal fall into that most deplorable of all poetic diseases—heart-breaking despondency of himself. Dare I, Sir, already immensely indebted to your goodness, ask the additional obligation of your being that friend to me? I inclose you an essay of mine in a walk of poesy to me entirely new; I mean the epistle addressed to R. G. Esq., or Robert Graham of Fintry, Esq., a gentleman of uncommon worth, to whom I lie under very great obligations. The story of the poem, like most of my poems, is connected with my own story, and to give you the one, I must give you something of the other. I cannot boast of Mr Creech's ingenuous fair dealing to me. He kept me hanging about Edinburgh from the 7th August, 1787, until the 13th April, 1788, before he would condescend to give me a statement of affairs; nor had I got it even then, but for an angry letter I wrote him, which irritated his pride. "I could" not a "tale" but a detail "unfold;" but what am I that should speak against the Lord's anointed Bailie of Edinburgh?

I believe I shall, in whole, 100*l.* copy-right included, clear about 400*l.* some little odds; and even part of this depends upon what the gentleman has yet to settle with me. I give you this information, because you did me the

honour to interest yourself much in my welfare. I give you this information, but I give it to yourself only, for I am still much in the gentleman's mercy. Perhaps I injure the man in the idea I am sometimes tempted to have of him—God forbid I should! A little time will try, for in a month I shall go to town to wind up the business if possible.

To give the rest of my story in brief, I have married "my Jean," and taken a farm; with the first step I have every day more and more reason to be satisfied: with the last, it is rather the reverse. I have a younger brother, who supports my aged mother; another still younger brother, and three sisters, in a farm. On my last return from Edinburgh it cost me about 180*l.* to save them from ruin. Not that I have lost so much—I only interposed between my brother and his impending fate by the loan of so much. I give myself no airs on this, for it was mere selfishness on my part: I was conscious that the wrong scale of the balance was pretty heavily charged, and I thought that throwing a little filial piety and fraternal affection into the scale in my favour, might help to smooth matters at the *grand reckoning.* There is still one thing would make my circumstances quite easy: I have an excise officer's commission, and I live in the midst of a country division. My request to Mr Graham, who is one of the commissioners of excise, was, if in his power, to procure me that division. If I were very sanguine, I might hope that some of my great patrons might procure me a treasury warrant for supervisor, surveyor-general, &c.

Thus, secure of a livelihood, "to thee, sweet poetry, delightful maid," I would consecrate my future days.

R. B.

No. CXLI.

TO MR ROBERT AINSLIE.

ELLISLAND, *January 6th*, 1789.

MANY happy returns of the season to you, my dear Sir! May you be comparatively happy up to your comparative worth among the sons of men; which wish would, I am sure, make you one of the most blest of the human race.

I do not know if passing a "Writer to the signet" be a trial of scientific merit, or a mere business of friends and interest. However it be, let me quote you my two favourite passages, which, though I have repeated them ten thousand times, still they rouse my manhood and steel my resolution like inspiration.

> ——————— "On Reason build resolve,
> That column of true majesty in man."
>
> YOUNG.

> "Hear, Alfred, hero of the state,
> Thy genius heaven's high will declare;
> The triumph of the truly great,
> Is never, never to despair!
> Is never to despair!"
>
> MASQUE OF ALFRED.

I grant you enter the lists of life, to struggle for bread, business, notice, and distinction, in common with hundreds. But who are they? Men like yourself, and of that aggregate body your compeers, seven-tenths of them come short of your advantages, natural and accidental; while two of those that remain, either neglect their parts, as flowers blooming in a desert, or misspend their strength like a bull goring a bramble bush.

But to change the theme: I am still catering for Johnson's publication; and among others, I have brushed up the following old favourite song a little, with a view to your worship. I have only altered a word here and there; but

if you like the humour of it, we shall think of a stanza or two to add to it.

R. B.*

No. CXLII.

TO PROFESSOR DUGALD STEWART.

ELLISLAND, 20*th Jan.*, 1789.

SIR,

THE inclosed sealed packet I sent to Edinburgh, a few days after I had the happiness of meeting you in Ayrshire, but you were gone for the continent. I have now added a few more of my productions, those for which I am indebted to the Nithsdale Muses. The piece inscribed to R. G. Esq. is a copy of verses I sent Mr Graham of Fintry, accompanying a request for his assistance in a matter to me of very great moment. To that gentleman I am already doubly indebted; for deeds of kindness of serious import to my dearest interests, done in a manner grateful to the delicate feelings of sensibility. This poem is a species of composition new to me, but I do not intend it shall be my last essay of the kind, as you will see by the "Poet's Progress." These fragments, if my design succeed, are but a small part of the intended whole. I propose it shall be the work of my utmost exertions, ripened by years; of course I do not wish it much known. The fragment beginning "A little upright, pert, tart," &c. I have not shown to man living, till I now send it you. It forms the postulata, the axioms, the definition of a character, which, if it appear at all, shall be placed in a variety of lights. This particu-

* At this period Burns was busily employed writing and collecting for Johnson's Musical Museum; but we have no means of ascertaining what was the particular song alluded to by him, although, in all probability, it was one of a humorous or convivial cast.—M.

lar part I send you merely as a sample of my hand at portrait-sketching; but, lest idle conjecture should pretend to point out the original, please to let it be for your single, sole inspection.

Need I make any apology for this trouble, to a gentleman who has treated me with such marked benevolence and peculiar kindness; who has entered into my interests with so much zeal, and on whose critical decisions I can so fully depend? A poet as I am by trade, these decisions are to me of the last consequence. My late transient acquaintance among some of the mere rank and file of greatness, I resign with ease; but to the distinguished champions of genius and learning, I shall be ever ambitious of being known. The native genius and accurate discernment in Mr Stewart's critical strictures; the justness (iron justice, for he has no bowels of compassion for a poor poetic sinner) of Dr Gregory's remarks, and the delicacy of Professor Dalzel's taste, I shall ever revere.

I shall be in Edinburgh some time next month.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your highly obliged, and very humble servant,

R. B.

No. CXLIII.

TO BISHOP GEDDES.

ELLISLAND, *3d Feb.*, 1789.

VENERABLE FATHER,

As I am conscious that wherever I am, you do me the honour to interest yourself in my welfare, it gives me pleasure to inform you, that I am here at last, stationary in the serious business of life, and have now not only the retired leisure, but the hearty inclination, to attend to those great and important questions,—what I am? where I am? and for what I am destined?

In that first concern, the conduct of the man, there was ever but one side on which I was habitually blameable, and there I have secured myself in the way pointed out by nature and nature's God. I was sensible that, to so helpless a creature as a poor poet, a wife and family were incumbrances, which a species of prudence would bid him shun; but when the alternative was, being at eternal warfare with myself, on account of habitual follies, to give them no worse name, which no general example, no licentious wit, no sophistical infidelity, would, to me, ever justify, I must have been a fool to have hesitated, and a madman to have made another choice. Besides, I had in "my Jean" a long and much-loved fellow-creature's happiness or misery among my hands, and who could trifle with such a deposite?

In the affair of a livelihood, I think myself tolerably secure: I have good hopes of my farm, but should they fail, I have an excise commission, which, on my simple petition, will, at any time procure me bread. There is a certain stigma affixed to the character of an excise officer, but I do not pretend to borrow honour from my profession; and though the salary be comparatively small, it is luxury to any thing that the first twenty-five years of my life taught me to expect.

Thus, with a rational aim and method in life, you may easily guess, my reverend and much honoured friend, that my characteristical trade is not forgotten. I am, if possible, more than ever an enthusiast to the muses. I am determined to study man and nature, and in that view incessantly; and to try if the ripening and corrections of years can enable me to produce something worth preserving.

You will see in your book, which I beg your pardon for detaining so long, that I have been tuning my lyre on the banks of Nith. Some large poetic plans that are floating in my imagination, or partly put in execution, I shall impart to you when I have the pleasure of meeting with you;

which, if you are then in Edinburgh, I shall have about the beginning of March.

That acquaintance, worthy Sir, with which you were pleased to honour me, you must still allow me to challenge; for with whatever unconcern I give up my transient connexion with the merely great, I cannot lose the patronizing notice of the learned and good, without the bitterest regret.

R. B.*

No. CXLIV.

TO MR JAMES BURNESS.

ELLISLAND, *9th Feb.*, 1789.

MY DEAR SIR,

WHY I did not write to you long ago is what, even on the rack, I could not answer. If you can in your mind form an idea of indolence, dissipation, hurry, cares, change of country, entering on untried scenes of life, all combined, you will save me the trouble of a blushing apology. It could not be want of regard for a man for whom I had a high esteem before I knew him,—an esteem, which has much increased since I did know him; and this caveat

* The Roman Catholic clergyman, to whom this letter is addressed, acquired no inconsiderable fame as a writer of Scottish songs, as a scholar, a controversialist, and a translator. His works are well known. He died 20th February, 1802, in the sixty-third year of his age. We are informed by Mr Cunningham, in his recent edition of Burns' works, that the volume sent to the bishop "was the Edinburgh copy of his poems, with the addition in his own hand-writing of such compositions as the Muse of Nithsdale had inspired. The blanks too in the print were all filled up." Mr C. adds, "This precious book belongs to Margaret Geddes, the wife of my friend John Hyslop, surgeon, Finsbury-square, grandson of John Maxwell of Terraughty, to whom the poet addressed one of his most spirited epistles; it is in good preservation, and in equally excellent hands."—M.

entered, I shall plead guilty to any other indictment with which you shall please to charge me.

After I parted from you, for many months my life was one continued scene of dissipation. Here at last I am become stationary, and have taken a farm and—a wife.

The farm is beautifully situated on the Nith, a large river that runs by Dumfries, and falls into the Solway frith. I nave gotten a lease of my farm as long as I pleased; but how it may turn out is just a guess, and it is yet to improve and inclose, &c.; however, I have good hopes of my bargain on the whole.

My wife is my Jean, with whose story you are partly acquainted. I found I had a much loved fellow-creature's happiness or misery among my hands, and I durst not trifle with so sacred a deposite. Indeed I have not any reason to repent the step I have taken, as I have attached myself to a very good wife, and have shaken myself loose of every bad failing.

I have found my book a very profitable business, and with the profits of it I have begun life pretty decently. Should fortune not favour me in farming, as I have no great faith in her fickle ladyship, I have provided myself in another resource, which, however some folks may affect to despise it, is still a comfortable shift in the day of misfortune. In the heyday of my fame, a gentleman, whose name at least I dare say you know, as his estate lies somewhere near Dundee, Mr Graham of Fintry, one of the commissioners of Excise, offered me the commission of an excise-officer. I thought it prudent to accept the offer; and, accordingly, I took my instructions, and have my commission by me. Whether I may ever do duty, or be a penny the better for it, is what I do not know; but I have the comfortable assurance, that, come whatever ill fate will, I can, on my simple petition to the excise-board, get into employ.

We have lost poor uncle Robert this winter. He has

long been very weak, and with very little alteration on him, he expired 3d January.

His son William has been with me this winter, and goes in May to be an apprentice to a mason. His other son, the eldest, John, comes to me I expect in summer. They are both remarkably stout young fellows, and promise to do well. His only daughter, Fanny, has been with me ever since her father's death, and I purpose keeping her in my family till she be quite woman grown, and fit for better service. She is one of the cleverest girls, and has one of the most amiable dispositions I have ever seen.

All friends in this country and Ayrshire are well. Remember me to all friends in the north. My wife joins me in compliments to Mrs B. and family.

I am ever, my dear cousin,
Yours, sincerely,
R. B.*

No. CXLV.

TO MRS DUNLOP.

ELLISLAND, *4th March*, 1789.

HERE am I, my honoured friend, returned safe from the capital. To a man who has a home, however humble or remote—if that home is like mine, the scene of domestic comfort—the bustle of Edinburgh will soon be a business of sickening disgust.

"Vain pomp and glory of this world, I hate you!"

* "Fanny Burns, the poet's relation, merited all the commendations he has here bestowed. I remember her while she lived at Ellisland, and better still as the wife of Adam Armour, the brother of bonnie Jean; she went with her husband to Mauchline, and lived long and respectably. Her son is now with his paternal uncle, pursuing successfully the honourable calling of a London merchant."—*Cunningham.*

When I must skulk into a corner, lest the rattling equipage of some gaping blockhead should mangle me in the mire, I am tempted to exclaim—"What merits has he had, or what demerit have I had, in some state of pre-existence, that he is ushered into this state of being with the sceptre of rule, and the key of riches in his puny fist, and I am kicked into the world, the sport of folly, or the victim of pride?" I have read somewhere of a monarch, (in Spain I think it was,) who was so out of humour with the Ptolomean system of astronomy, that he said, had he been of the Creator's council, he could have saved him a great deal of labour and absurdity. I will not defend this blasphemous speech; but often, as I have glided with humble stealth through the pomp of Princes'-street, it has suggested itself to me, as an improvement on the present human figure, that a man, in proportion to his own conceit of his consequence in the world, could have pushed out the longitude of his common size, as a snail pushes out his horns, or as we draw out a perspective. This trifling alteration, not to mention the prodigious saving it would be in the tear and wear of the neck and limb-sinews of many of his majesty's liege-subjects, in the way of tossing the head and tiptoe strutting, would evidently turn out a vast advantage, in enabling us at once to adjust the ceremonials in making a bow, or making way to a great man, and that too within a second of the precise spherical angle of reverence, or an inch of the particular point of respectful distance, which the important creature itself requires; as a measuring-glance at its towering altitude would determine the affair like instinct.

You are right, Madam, in your idea of poor Mylne's poem, which he has addressed to me. The piece has a good deal of merit, but it has one great fault—it is, by far, too long. Besides, my success has encouraged such a shoal of ill-spawned monsters to crawl into public notice, under the title of Scottish Poets, that the very term Scottish Poetry borders on the burlesque. When I write to Mr Carfrae, I

shall advise him rather to try one of his deceased friend's English pieces. I am prodigiously hurried with my own matters, else I would have requested a perusal of all Mylne's poetic performances, and would have offered his friends my assistance in either selecting or correcting what would be proper for the press. What it is that occupies me so much, and perhaps a little oppresses my present spirits, shall fill up a paragraph in some future letter. In the mean time, allow me to close this epistle with a few lines done by a friend of mine. * * * * * I give you them, that, as you have seen the original, you may guess whether one or two alterations I have ventured to make in them, be any real improvement.

"Like the fair plant that from our touch withdraws,
Shrink, mildly fearful, even from applause,
Be all a mother's fondest hope can dream,
And all you are, my charming * * * *, seem.
Straight as the fox-glove, ere her bells disclose,
Mild as the maiden-blushing hawthorn blows,
Fair as the fairest of each lovely kind,
Your form shall be the image of your mind;
Your manners shall so true your soul express,
That all shall long to know the worth they guess;
Congenial hearts shall greet with kindred love,
And even sick'ning envy must approve."

R. B.*

* "These beautiful lines, we have reason to believe, are the production of the lady to whom this letter is addressed."—*Currie.*

Burns never writ truer word than when he alludes to the monstrous spawn of poetasters which inundated the public immediately after the merits of his muse were universally acknowledged. It is amusing to read the effusions of some of these blockheads, many of whom affect to hold in sovereign contempt the genius of that great one who had the sin upon his head of calling into existence so vast a crowd of wretched scribblers, and self-satisfied but truly contemptible imitators. A collection of the choicest flowers, culled from the numerous works of these obscure Scottish rhymsters, would be no mean contribution to whatever can amuse, if not delight and instruct the age.—M.

No. CXLVI.

TO THE REV. P. CARFRAE.

1789.

Rev. Sir,

I do not recollect that I have ever felt a severer pang of shame, than on looking at the date of your obliging letter which accompanied Mr Mylne's poem.

I am much to blame: the honour Mr Mylne has done me, greatly enhanced in its value by the endearing, though melancholy circumstance, of its being the last production of his muse, deserved a better return.

I have, as you hint, thought of sending a copy of the poem to some periodical publication; but, on second thoughts, I am afraid that, in the present case, it would be an improper step. My success, perhaps as much accidental as merited, has brought an inundation of nonsense under the name of Scottish poetry. Subscription-bills for Scottish poems, have so dunned, and daily do dun the public, that the very name is in danger of contempt. For these reasons, if publishing any of Mr Mylne's poems in a magazine, &c. be at all prudent, in my opinion it certainly should not be a Scottish poem. The profits of the labours of a man of genius, are, I hope, as honourable as any profits whatever; and Mr Mylne's relations are most justly entitled to that honest harvest which fate has denied himself to reap. But let the friends of Mr Mylne's fame (among whom I crave the honour of ranking myself,) always keep in eye his respectability as a man and as a poet, and take no measure that, before the world knows any thing about him, would risk his name and character being classed with the fools of the times.

I have, Sir, some experience of publishing; and the way in which I would proceed with Mr Mylne's poems, is this: —I will publish, in two or three English and Scottish public papers, any one of his English poems which should, by

private judges, be thought the most excellent, and mention it, at the same time, as one of the productions of a Lothian farmer of respectable character, lately deceased, whose poems his friends had it in idea to publish soon by subscription, for the sake of his numerous family; not in pity to that family, but in justice to what his friends think the poetic merits of the deceased; and to secure, in the most effectual manner, to those tender connexions, whose right it is, the pecuniary reward of those merits.

R. B.*

* In the preceding letter to this, Burns has alluded to Mr Mylne, and we have no reason to doubt that he was an aspirant for fame in Scottish poetry, with little of the poet in him. The letter from the Rev. Peter Carfrae explains the subject on which he solicited Burns' advice:—

"2d *Jan.*, 1789.

"SIR,—If you have lately seen Mrs Dunlop of Dunlop, you have certainly heard of the author of the verses which accompany this letter. He was a man highly respectable for every accomplishment and virtue which adorns the character of a man or a Christian. To a great degree of literature, of taste, and poetic genius, was added an invincible modesty of temper, which prevented, in a great degree, his figuring in life, and confined the perfect knowledge of his character and talents to the small circle of his chosen friends. He was untimely taken from us a few weeks ago, by an inflammatory fever, in the prime of life; beloved by all who enjoyed his acquaintance, and lamented by all who have any regard for virtue or genius. There is a woe pronounced in Scripture against the person whom all men speak well of; if ever that woe fell upon the head of mortal man, it fell upon him. He has left behind him a considerable number of compositions, chiefly poetical, sufficient, I imagine, to make a large octavo volume. In particular, two complete and regular tragedies, a farce of three acts, and some smaller poems on different subjects. It falls to my share, who have lived in the most intimate and uninterrupted friendship with him from my youth upwards, to transmit to you the verses he wrote on the publication of your incomparable poems. It is probable they were his last, as they were found in his scrutoire, folded up with the form of a letter addressed to you, and, I imagine, were only prevented from being sent by himself, by that melancholy dispensation which we still bemoan. The verses themselves I will not pretend to criticise when writing to a gentleman whom I consider as entirely qualified to judge of their merit. They are the only verses he seems to have attempted in

No. CXLVII.

TO DR MOORE.

ELLISLAND, 23*d March*, 1789.

SIR,

THE gentleman who will deliver you this is a Mr Nielson, a worthy clergyman in my neighbourhood, and a very particular acquaintance of mine. As I have troubled him with this packet, I must turn him over to your goodness, to recompense him for it in a way in which he much needs your assistance, and where you can effectually serve him. Mr Nielson is on his way for France, to wait on his Grace of Queensberry, on some little business of a good deal of importance to him, and he wishes for your instructions respecting the most eligible mode of travelling, &c. for him, when he has crossed the channel. I should not have dared to take this liberty with you, but that I am told, by those who have the honour of your personal acquaintance, that to be a poor honest Scotchman is a letter of recommendation to you, and that to have it in your power to serve such a character, gives you much pleasure.

The inclosed ode is a compliment to the memory of the late Mrs Oswald of Auchencruive. You probably knew

the Scottish style; and I hesitate not to say, in general, that they will bring no dishonour on the Scottish muse: and allow me to add, that, if it is your opinion they are not unworthy of the author, and will be no discredit to you, it is the inclination of Mr Mylne's friends that they should be immediately published in some periodical work, to give the world a specimen of what may be expected from his performances in the poetic line, which, perhaps, will be afterwards published for the advantage of his family.

* * * *

"I must beg the favour of a letter from you, acknowledging the receipt of this, and to be allowed to subscribe myself, with great regard,

"Sir, your most obedient servant,

"P. CARFRAE."

her personally, an honour of which I cannot boast; but I spent my early years in her neighbourhood, and among her servants and tenants. I know that she was detested with the most heartfelt cordiality. However, in the particular part of her conduct, which roused my poetic wrath, she was much less blameable. In January last, on my road to Ayrshire, I had put up at Bailie Whigham's, in Sanquhar, the only tolerable inn in the place. The frost was keen, and the grim evening and howling wind were ushering in a night of snow and drift. My horse and I were both much fatigued with the labours of the day, and just as my friend the Bailie and I were bidding defiance to the storm, over a smoking bowl, in wheels the funeral pageantry of the late great Mrs Oswald, and poor I am forced to brave all the horrors of the tempestuous night, and jade my horse, my young favourite horse, whom I had just christened Pegasus, twelve miles farther on, through the wildest moors and hills of Ayrshire, to New Cumnock, the next inn. The powers of poesy and prose sink under me, when I would describe what I felt. Suffice it to say, that when a good fire at New Cumnock had so far recovered my frozen sinews, I sat down and wrote the inclosed ode.*

* The ode alluded to is printed in vol. i. p. 187. Two months afterwards Dr Moore returned the following reply:—

"CLIFFORD-STREET, 10*th June*, 1789.

"DEAR SIR,—I thank you for the different communications you have made me of your occasional productions in manuscript, all of which have merit, and some of them merit of a different kind from what appears in the poems you have published. You ought carefully to preserve all your occasional productions, to correct and improve them at your leisure; and when you can select as many of these as will make a volume, publish it either at Edinburgh or London by subscription: on such an occasion, it may be in my power, as it is very much in my inclination, to be of service to you.

"If I were to offer an opinion, it would be, that, in your future productions, you should abandon the Scottish stanza and dialect, and adopt the measure and language of modern English poetry.

I was at Edinburgh lately, and settled finally with Mr Creech; and I must own, that, at last, he has been amicable and fair with me.

R. B.

"The stanza which you use in imitation of 'Christ Kirk on the Green,' with the tiresome repetition of 'that day,' is fatiguing to English ears, and I should think not very agreeable to Scottish.

"All the fine satire and humour of your 'Holy Fair,' is lost on the English; yet, without more trouble to yourself, you could have conveyed the whole to them. The same is true of some of your other poems. In your Epistle to J. S———, the stanzas from that beginning with this line, 'This life, so far's I understand,' to that which ends with, 'Short while it grieves,' are easy, flowing, gaily philosophical, and of Horatian elegance,—the language is English, with a few Scottish words, and some of those so harmonious as to add to the beauty; for what poet would not prefer gloaming to twilight?

"I imagine, that by carefully keeping, and occasionally polishing and correcting those verses which the muse dictates, you will, within a year or two, have another volume as large as the first, ready for the press; and this, without diverting you from every proper attention to the study and practice of husbandry, in which I understand you are very learned, and which I fancy you will choose to adhere to as a wife, while poetry amuses you from time to time as a mistress. The former, like a prudent wife, must not show ill humour, although you retain a sneaking kindness to this agreeable gipsy, and pay her occasional visits, which in no manner alienates your heart from your lawful spouse, but tends, on the contrary, to promote her interest.

"I desired Mr Cadell to write to Mr Creech to send you a copy of Zeluco. This performance has had great success here; but I shall be glad to have your opinion of it, because I value your opinion, and because I know you are above saying what you do not think.

"I beg you will offer my best wishes to my very good friend, Mrs Hamilton, who, I understand, is your neighbour. If she is as happy as I wish her, she is happy enough. Make my compliments also to Mrs Burns; and believe me to be, with sincere esteem,

"Dear Sir, yours, &c."

No. CXLVIII.

TO MR HILL.

ELLISLAND, *2d April*, 1789.

I WILL make no excuse, my dear Bibliopolus, (God forgive me for murdering language!) that I have sat down to write you on this vile paper.

It is economy, Sir; it is that cardinal virtue, prudence; so I beg you will sit down, and either compose or borrow a panegyric. If you are going to borrow, apply to * * * * to compose, or rather to compound, something very clever on my remarkable frugality; that I write to one of my most esteemed friends on this wretched paper, which was originally intended for the venal fist of some drunken exciseman, to take dirty notes in a miserable vault of an ale-cellar.

O Frugality! thou mother of ten thousand blessings,—thou cook of fat beef and dainty greens!—thou manufacturer of warm Shetland hose, and comfortable surtouts!—thou old housewife, darning thy decayed stockings with thy ancient spectacles on thy aged nose!—lead me, hand me in thy clutching palsied fist, up those heights, and through those thickets, hitherto inaccessible, and impervious to my anxious, weary feet:—not those Parnassian crags, bleak and barren, where the hungry worshippers of fame are, breathless, clambering, hanging between heaven and hell; but those glittering cliffs of Potosi, where the all-sufficient, all-powerful deity, wealth, holds his immediate court of joys and pleasures; where the sunny exposure of plenty, and the hot walls of profusion, produce those blissful fruits of luxury, exotics in this world, and natives of paradise!—Thou withered sibyl, my sage conductress, usher me into thy refulgent, adored presence!—The power, splendid and potent as he now is, was once the puling nursling of thy faithful care and tender arms! Call me thy son, thy cousin,

thy kinsman, or favourite, and adjure the god by the scenes of his infant years, no longer to repulse me as a stranger, or an alien, but to favour me with his peculiar countenance and protection! He daily bestows his greatest kindness on the undeserving and the worthless,—assure him that I bring ample documents of meritorious demerits! Pledge yourself for me, that, for the glorious cause of lucre, I will do any thing, be any thing; but the horse-leech of private oppression, or the vulture of public robbery!

But to descend from heroics.

I want a Shakspeare; I want likewise an English dictionary,—Johnson's, I suppose, is best. In these and all my prose commissions, the cheapest is always the best for me. There is a small debt of honour that I owe Mr Robert Cleghorn, in Saughton Mills, my worthy friend, and your well-wisher. Please give him, and urge him to take it, the first time you see him, ten shillings worth of any thing you have to sell, and place it to my account.

The library scheme that I mentioned to you is already begun under the direction of Captain Riddel. There is another in emulation of it going on at Closeburn, under the auspices of Mr Monteith of Closeburn, which will be on a greater scale than ours. Captain Riddel gave his infant society a great many of his old books, else I had written you on that subject; but, one of these days, I shall trouble you with a commission for "The Monkland Friendly Society,"—a copy of 'The Spectator,' 'Mirror,' and 'Lounger,' 'Man of Feeling,' 'Man of the World,' 'Guthrie's Geographical Grammar,' with some religious pieces, will likely be our first order.

When I grow richer, I will write to you on gilt-post, to make amends for this sheet. At present every guinea has a five guinea errand with,

My dear Sir,

Your faithful, poor, but honest friend,

R. B.

No. CXLIX.

TO MRS DUNLOP.

ELLISLAND, *4th April*, 1789.

I NO sooner hit on any poetic plan or fancy, but I wish to send it to you; and if knowing and reading these give half the pleasure to you, that communicating them to you gives to me, I am satisfied.

I have a poetic whim in my head, which I at present dedicate, or rather inscribe, to the Right Hon. Charles James Fox; but how long that fancy may hold, I cannot say. A few of the first lines I have just rough sketched as follows:—

SKETCH.

How wisdom and folly meet, mix, and unite;
How virtue and vice blend their black and their white;
How genius, the illustrious father of fiction,
Confounds rule and law, reconciles contradiction—
I sing: if these mortals, the critics, should bustle,
I care not, not I, let the critics go whistle.

But now for a patron, whose name and whose glory,
At once may illustrate and honour my story.

Thou first of our orators, first of our wits;
Yet whose parts and acquirements seem mere lucky hits;
With knowledge so vast, and with judgment so strong,
No man with the half of 'em e'er went far wrong;
With passions so potent, and fancies so bright,
No man with the half of 'em e'er went quite right;
A sorry, poor misbegot son of the muses,
For using thy name offers fifty excuses.

See vol. ii. *page* 16.

On the 20th current I hope to have the honour of assuring you, in person, how sincerely I am,

R. B.

No. CL.

TO MRS M'MURDO, DRUMLANRIG.

ELLISLAND, 2*d May*, 1789.

MADAM,

I HAVE finished the piece which had the happy fortune to be honoured with your approbation; and never did little Miss with more sparkling pleasure show her applauded sampler to partial Mamma, than I now send my poem to you and Mr M'Murdo, if he is returned to Drumlanrig. You cannot easily imagine what thin-skinned animals—what sensitive plants poor poets are. How do we shrink into the imbittered corner of self-abasement, when neglected or condemned by those to whom we look up! and how do we, in erect importance, add another cubit to our stature on being noticed and applauded by those whom we honour and respect! My late visit to Drumlanrig has, I can tell you, Madam, given me a balloon waft up Parnassus, where on my fancied elevation I regard my poetic self with no small degree of complacency. Surely with all their sins, the rhyming tribe are not ungrateful creatures.—I recollect your goodness to your humble guest—I see Mr M'Murdo adding to the politeness of the gentleman, the kindness of a friend, and my heart swells as it would burst, with warm emotions and ardent wishes! It may be it is not gratitude—it may be a mixed sensation. That strange, shifting, doubling animal MAN is so generally, at best, but a negative, often a worthless creature, that we cannot see real goodness and native worth without feeling the bosom glow with sympathetic approbation.

With every sentiment of grateful respect,
I have the honour to be,
Madam,
Your obliged and grateful humble servant,
R. B.

No. CLI.

TO MR CUNNINGHAM.

ELLISLAND, *4th May*, 1789.

MY DEAR SIR,

YOUR *duty-free* favour of the 26th April I received two days ago; I will not say I perused it with pleasure; that is the cold compliment of ceremony; I perused it, Sir, with delicious satisfaction;—in short, it is such a letter, that not you, nor your friend, but the legislature, by express proviso in their postage laws, should frank. A letter informed with the soul of friendship is such an honour to human nature, that they should order it free ingress and egress to and from their bags and mails, as an encouragement and mark of distinction to supereminent virtue.

I have just put the last hand to a little poem, which I think will be something to your taste. One morning lately, as I was out pretty early in the fields, sowing some grass seeds, I heard the burst of a shot from a neighbouring plantation, and presently a poor little wounded hare came crippling by me. You will guess my indignation at the inhuman fellow who could shoot a hare at this season, when all of them have young ones. Indeed there is something in that business of destroying for our sport individuals in the animal creation that do not injure us materially, which I could never reconcile to my ideas of virtue.

Inhuman man! curse on thy barb'rous art,
And blasted be thy murder-aiming eye!
May never pity soothe thee with a sigh,
Nor ever pleasure glad thy cruel heart!

Go live, poor wanderer of the wood and field
The bitter little that of life remains;
No more the thickening brakes or verdant plains,
To thee a home, or food, or pastime yield.

Seek, mangled innocent, some wonted form;
That wonted form, alas! thy dying bed,
The sheltering rushes whistling o'er thy head,
The cold earth with thy blood-stain'd bosom warm.

Perhaps a mother's anguish adds its woe;
The playful pair crowd fondly by thy side;
Ah! helpless nurslings, who will now provide
That life a mother only can bestow?

Oft as by winding Nith, I, musing, wait
The sober eve, or hail the cheerful dawn,
I'll miss thee sporting o'er the dewy lawn,
And curse the ruthless wretch, and mourn thy hapless fate.

Let me know how you like my poem. I am doubtful whether it would not be an improvement to keep out the last stanza but one altogether.

Cruikshank is a glorious production of the author of man. You, he, and the noble Colonel* of the Crochallan Fencibles are to me

"Dear as the ruddy drops which warm my heart."

I have got a good mind to make verses on you all, to the tune of '*Three guid fellows ayont the glen.*'

R. B.†

* That is, William Dunbar, W. S.

† The poem in the above letter had also been sent by our Bard to Dr Gregory for his criticism. The following is that gentleman's reply:—

"EDINBURGH, *2d June*, 1789.

"DEAR SIR,—I take the first leisure hour I could command, to thank you for your letter, and the copy of verses inclosed in it. As there is real poetic merit, I mean both fancy and tenderness, and some happy expressions in them, I think they well deserve that you should revise them carefully, and polish them to the utmost. This I am sure you can do if you please, for you have great command both of expression and of rhymes: and you may judge from the two last pieces of Mrs Hunter's poetry, that I gave you, how much correctness and high polish enhance the value of such compositions. As you desire it, I shall, with great freedom, give you my *most rigorous* criticisms on your verses. I wish you would give me another edition of them, much amended, and I will send it to Mrs Hunter, who, I am sure, will have much

No. CLII.

TO MR SAMUEL BROWN.

MOSSGIEL, *4th May*, 1789.

DEAR UNCLE,

THIS, I hope, will find you and your conjugal yoke-fellow in your good old way; I am impatient to know if the Ailsa fowling be commenced for this season yet, as I want three or four stones of feathers, and I hope you will bespeak them

pleasure in reading it. Pray give me likewise for myself, and her too, a copy (as much amended as you please) of the 'Water Fowl on Loch Turit.'

"'The Wounded Hare' is a pretty good subject; but the measure or stanza you have chosen for it is not a good one; it does not *flow* well; and the rhyme of the fourth line is almost lost by its distance from the first, and the two interposed close rhymes. If I were you, I would put it into a different stanza yet.

"Stanza 1. The execrations in the first two lines are too strong or coarse; but they may pass. 'Murder-aiming' is a bad compound epithet, and not very intelligible. 'Blood-stained,' in stanza iii. line 4, has the same fault: *Bleeding* bosom is infinitely better. You have accustomed yourself to such epithets, and have no notion how stiff and quaint they appear to others, and how incongruous with poetic fancy and tender sentiments. Suppose Pope had written, 'Why that blood-stained bosom gored,' how would you have liked it? *Form* is neither a poetic, nor a dignified, nor a plain common word: it is a mere sportsman's word; unsuitable to pathetic or serious poetry.

"'Mangled' is a coarse word. 'Innocent,' in this sense, is a nursery word, but both may pass.

"Stanza 4. 'Who will now provide that life a mother only can bestow?' will not do at all: it is not grammar—it is not intelligible. Do you mean, 'provide for that life which the mother had bestowed and used to provide for?'

"There was a ridiculous slip of the pen, 'Feeling' (I suppose) for 'Fellow,' in the title of your copy of verses; but even fellow would be wrong; it is but a colloquial and vulgar word, unsuitable to your sentiments. 'Shot' is improper too.—On seeing a *person* (or a sportsman) wound a hare; it is needless to add with what weapon; but if you think otherwise, you should say, *with a fowling-piece.*

"Let me see you when you come to town, and I will show you some more of Mrs Hunter's poems."

for me. It would be a vain attempt for me to enumerate the various transactions I have been engaged in since I saw you last, but this know,—I am engaged in a *smuggling trade*, and God knows if ever any poor man experienced better returns, two for one, but as freight and delivery have turned out so dear, I am thinking of taking out a license and beginning in fair trade. I have taken a farm on the borders of the Nith, and in imitation of the old patriarchs, get men-servants and maid-servants, and flocks and herds, and beget sons and daughters.

Your obedient Nephew,
R. B.

No. CLIII.

TO RICHARD BROWN.

MAUCHLINE, 21*st May*, 1789.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I WAS in the country by accident, and hearing of your safe arrival, I could not resist the temptation of wishing you joy on your return,—wishing you would write to me before you sail again,—wishing you would always set me down as your bosom friend,—wishing you long life and prosperity, and that every good thing may attend you,—wishing Mrs Brown and your little ones as free of the evils of this world

It must be admitted, that this criticism is not more distinguished by its good sense, than by its freedom from ceremony. It is impossible not to smile at the manner in which the poet may be supposed to have received it. In fact it appears, as the sailors say, to have thrown him *quite aback*. In a letter which he wrote soon after, he says "Dr Gregory is a good man, but he crucifies me." And again, "I believe in the iron justice of Dr Gregory; but, like the devils, I believe and tremble." However, he profited by these criticisms, as the reader will find by comparing this first edition of the poem with that published, Vol. I. p. 239. —*Currie.*

as is consistent with humanity,—wishing you and she were to make two at the ensuing lying-in, with which Mrs B. threatens very soon to favour me,—wishing I had longer time to write to you at present; and, finally, wishing that if there is to be another state of existence, Mr B., Mrs B. our little ones, and both families, and you and I, in some snug retreat, may make a jovial party to all eternity!

My direction is at Ellisland, near Dumfries.

Yours, R. B.

No. CLIV.

TO MR JAMES HAMILTON.*

ELLISLAND, *26th May*, 1789.

DEAR SIR,

I SEND you by John Glover, carrier, the above account for Mr Turnbull, as I suppose you know his address.

I would fain offer, my dear Sir, a word of sympathy with your misfortunes; but it is a tender string, and I know not how to touch it. It is easy to flourish a set of high-flown sentiments on the subjects that would give great satisfaction to—a breast quite at ease; but as ONE observes, who was very seldom mistaken in the theory of life, "The heart knoweth its own sorrows, and a stranger intermeddleth not therewith."

Among some distressful emergencies that I have experienced in life, I ever laid this down as my foundation of comfort—*That he who has lived the life of an honest man, has by no means lived in vain!*

* Mr James Hamilton was a grocer in Glasgow, who had interested himself in the Poet's fortunes at one time; but who, apparently from the tenor of the present letter, appears to have latterly suffered from losses in business.—M.

With every wish for your welfare and future success,
I am, my dear Sir,
Sincerely yours,
R. B.

No. CLV.

TO WILLIAM CREECH, ESQ.

ELLISLAND, 30*th May*, 1789.

SIR,

I HAD intended to have troubled you with a long letter, but at present the delightful sensations of an omnipotent tooth-ache so engross all my inner man, as to put it out of my power even to write nonsense. However, as in duty bound, I approach my bookseller with an offering in my hand—a few poetic clinches, and a song:—to expect any other kind of offering from the Rhyming Tribe would be to know them much less than you do. I do not pretend that there is much merit in these *morceaux*, but I have two reasons for sending them; *primo*, they are mostly ill-natured, so are in unison with my present feelings, while fifty troops of infernal spirits are driving post from ear to ear along my jaw bones; and *secondly*, they are so short, that you cannot leave off in the middle, and so hurt my pride in the idea that you found any work of mine too heavy to get through.

I have a request to beg of you, and I not only beg of you, but conjure you, by all your wishes and by all your hopes, that the muse will spare the satiric wink in the moment of your foibles; that she will warble the song of rapture round your hymeneal couch; and that she will shed on your turf the honest tear of elegiac gratitude! Grant my request as speedy as possible—send me by the very first fly or coach for this place three copies of the last edition of my poems, which place to my account.

Now may the good things of prose, and the good things of verse, come among thy hands, until they be filled with the *good things of this life*, prayeth

R. B.

No. CLVI.

TO MR M'AULEY, OF DUMBARTON.

ELLISLAND, *4th June*, 1789.

DEAR SIR,

THOUGH I am not without my fears respecting my fate, at that grand, universal inquest of right and wrong, commonly called *The Last Day*, yet I trust there is one sin, which that arch-vagabond, Satan, who I understand is to be king's evidence, cannot throw in my teeth, I mean ingratitude. There is a certain pretty large quantum of kindness for which I remain, and from inability, I fear must still remain, your debtor; but though unable to repay the debt, I assure you, Sir, I shall ever warmly remember the obligation. It gives me the sincerest pleasure to hear by my old acquaintance, Mr Kennedy, that you are, in immortal Allan's language, "Hale, and weel, and living;" and that your charming family are well, and promising to be an amiable and respectable addition to the company of performers, whom the Great Manager of the Drama of Man is bringing into action for the succeeding age.

With respect to my welfare, a subject in which you once warmly and effectively interested yourself, I am here in my old way, holding my plough, marking the growth of my corn, or the health of my dairy; and at times sauntering by the delightful windings of the Nith, on the margin of which I have built my humble domicile, praying for seasonable weather, or holding an intrigue with the Muses; the only gypsies with whom I have now any intercourse. As I am entered into the holy state of matrimony, I trust my

face is turned completely Zion-ward; and as it is a rule with all honest fellows to repeat no grievances, I hope that the little poetic licences of former days will of course fall under the oblivious influence of some good-natured statute of celestial prescription. In my family devotion, which, like a good presbyterian, I occasionally give to my household folks, I am extremely fond of the psalm, "Let not the errors of my youth," &c. and that other, "Lo, children are God's heritage," &c. in which last Mrs Burns, who by the bye has a glorious "wood-note wild" at either old song or psalmody, joins me with the pathos of Handel's Messiah.

R. B.

No. CLVII.

TO MR ROBERT AINSLIE.

ELLISLAND, *8th June*, 1789.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I AM perfectly ashamed of myself when I look at the date of your last. It is not that I forget the friend of my heart and the companion of my peregrinations; but I have been condemned to drudgery beyond sufferance, though not, thank God, beyond redemption. I have had a collection of poems by a lady put into my hands to prepare them for the press; which horrid task, with sowing corn with my own hand, a parcel of masons, wrights, plasterers, &c. to attend to, roaming on business through Ayrshire—all this was against me, and the very first dreadful article was of itself too much for me.

13th. I have not had a moment to spare from incessant toil since the 8th. Life, my dear Sir, is a serious matter. You know by experience that a man's individual self is a good deal, but believe me, a wife and family of children, whenever you have the honour to be a husband and a

father, will show you that your present and most anxious hours of solitude are spent on trifles. The welfare of those who are very dear to us, whose only support, hope, and stay we are—this, to a generous mind, is another sort of more important object of care than any concerns whatever which centre merely in the individual. On the other hand, let no young, unmarried, rakehelly dog among you, make a song of his pretended liberty and freedom from care. If the relations we stand in to king, country, kindred, and friends, be any thing but the visionary fancies of dreaming metaphysicians; if religion, virtue, magnanimity, generosity, humanity and justice, be aught but empty sounds; then the man who may be said to live only for others, for the beloved, honourable female, whose tender faithful embrace endears life, and for the helpless little innocents who are to be the men and women, the worshippers of his God, the subjects of his king, and the support, nay the very vital existence of his COUNTRY, in the ensuing age;—compare such a man with any fellow whatever, who, whether he bustle and push in business among labourers, clerks, statesmen; or whether he roar and rant, and drink and sing in taverns—a fellow over whose grave no one will breathe a single heigh-ho, except from the cobweb-tie of what is called good fellowship—who has no view nor aim but what terminates in himself—if there be any grovelling earth-born wretch of our species, a renegado to common sense, who would fain believe that the noble creature man, is no better than a sort of fungus, generated out of nothing, nobody knows how, and soon dissipating in nothing, nobody knows where; such a stupid beast, such a crawling reptile, might balance the foregoing unexaggerated comparison, but no one else would have the patience.

Forgive me, my dear Sir, for this long silence. *To make you amends*, I shall send you soon, and more encouraging still, without any postage, one or two rhymes of my later manufacture. R. B.

No. CLVIII.

TO MR M'MURDO.

ELLISLAND, 19*th June*, 1789.

SIR,

A POET and a beggar are, in so many points of view, alike, that one might take them for the same individual character under different designations; were it not that though, with a trifling poetic license, most poets may be styled beggars, yet the converse of the proposition does not hold that every beggar is a poet. In one particular, however, they remarkably agree; if you help either the one or the other to a mug of ale, or the picking of a bone, they will very willingly repay you with a song. This occurs to me at present, as I have just despatched a well-lined rib of John Kirkpatrick's Highlander; a bargain for which I am indebted to you, in the style of our ballad printers, "Five excellent new songs." The inclosed is nearly my newest song, and one that has cost me some pains, though that is but an equivocal mark of its excellence. Two or three others, which I have by me, shall do themselves the honour to wait on your after leisure: petitioners for admittance into favour, must not harass the condescension of their benefactor.

You see, Sir, what it is to patronise a poet. 'Tis like being a magistrate in a petty borough; you do them the favour to preside in their council for one year, and your name bears the prefatory stigma of Bailie for life.

With, not the compliments, but the best wishes, the sincerest prayers of the season for you, that you may see many and happy years with Mrs M'Murdo, and your family; two blessings by the bye, to which your rank does not, by any means, entitle you; a loving wife and fine family being almost the only good things of this life to which the farm-house and cottage have an exclusive right,

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your much indebted and very humble servant, R. B.

No. CLIX.

TO MRS DUNLOP.

ELLISLAND, 21*st June*, 1789.

DEAR MADAM,

WILL you take the effusions, the miserable effusions of low spirits, just as they flow from their bitter spring? I know not of any particular cause for this worst of all my foes besetting me; but for some time my soul has been beclouded with a thickening atmosphere of evil imaginations and gloomy presages.

Monday Evening.

I have just heard Mr Kirkpatrick preach a sermon. He is a man famous for his benevolence, and I revere him: but from such ideas of my Creator, good Lord, deliver me! Religion, my honoured friend, is surely a simple business, as it equally concerns the ignorant and the learned, the poor and the rich. That there is an incomprehensible Great Being, to whom I owe my existence, and that he must be intimately acquainted with the operations and progress of the internal machinery, and consequent outward deportment of this creature which he has made; these are, I think, self-evident propositions. That there is a real and eternal distinction between virtue and vice, and consequently, that I am an accountable creature; that from the seeming nature of the human mind, as well as from the evident imperfection, nay, positive injustice, in the administration of affairs, both in the natural and moral worlds, there must be a retributive scene of existence beyond the grave; must, I think, be allowed by every one who will give himself a moment's reflection. I will go farther, and affirm, that from the sublimity, excellence, and purity of his doctrine and precepts, unparalleled by all the aggregated wisdom and learning of many preceding ages, though, to *appearance*, he himself was the obscurest and most illiterate of our species; therefore Jesus Christ was from God.

Whatever mitigates the woes, or increases the happiness of others, this is my criterion of goodness; and whatever injures society at large, or any individual in it, this is my measure of iniquity.

What think you, madam, of my creed? I trust that I have said nothing that will lessen me in the eye of one, whose good opinion I value almost next to the approbation of my own mind.

R. B.

No. CLX.

TO MR ———.

1789.

MY DEAR SIR,

THE hurry of a farmer in this particular season, and the indolence of a poet at all times and seasons, will, I hope, plead my excuse for neglecting so long to answer your obliging letter of the 5th of August.

That you have done well in quitting your laborious concern in * * * * I do not doubt; the weighty reasons you mention, were, I hope very, and deservedly indeed, weighty ones, and your health is a matter of the last importance; but whether the remaining proprietors of the paper have also done well, is what I much doubt. The * * * *, so far as I was a reader, exhibited such a brilliancy of point, such an elegance of paragraph, and such a variety of intelligence, that I can hardly conceive it possible to continue a daily paper in the same degree of excellence: but if there was a man who had abilities equal to the task, that man's assistance the proprietors have lost.

When I received your letter I was transcribing for * * * *, my letter to the magistrates of the Canongate, Edinburgh, begging their permission to place a tomb-stone over poor Fergusson, and their edict in consequence of my petition, but now I shall send them to ———. Poor Fergusson!

If there be a life beyond the grave, which I trust there is: and if there be a good God presiding over all nature, which I am sure there is; thou art now enjoying existence in a glorious world, where worth of the heart alone is distinction in the man; where riches, deprived of all their pleasure-purchasing powers, return to their native sordid matter; where titles and honours are the disregarded reveries of an idle dream: and where that heavy virtue, which is the negative consequence of steady dulness, and those thoughtless, though often destructive follies, which are the unavoidable aberrations of frail human nature, will be thrown into equal oblivion as if they had never been!

Adieu, my dear Sir! So soon as your present views and schemes are concentred in an aim, I shall be glad to hear from you; as your welfare and happiness is by no means a subject indifferent to

Yours, R. B.

No. CLXI.

TO MISS WILLIAMS.

ELLISLAND, 1789.

MADAM,

OF the many problems in the nature of that wonderful creature, man, this is one of the most extraordinary, that he shall go on from day to day, from week to week, from month to month, or perhaps from year to year, suffering a hundred times more in an hour from the impotent consciousness of neglecting what he ought to do, than the very doing of it would cost him. I am deeply indebted to you, first for a most elegant poetic compliment; then for a polite, obliging letter; and, lastly, for your excellent poem on the Slave-Trade; and yet, wretch that I am! though the debts were debts of honour, and the creditor a lady, I have put off and put off even the very acknowledgment of

the obligation, until you must indeed be the very angel I take you for, if you can forgive me.

Your poem I have read with the highest pleasure. I have a way whenever I read a book, I mean a book in our own trade, Madam, a poetic one, and when it is my own property, that I take a pencil and mark at the ends of verses, or note on margins and odd paper, little criticisms of approbation or disapprobation as I peruse along. I will make no apology for presenting you with a few unconnected thoughts that occurred to me in my repeated perusals of your poem. I want to show you that I have honesty enough to tell you what I take to be truths, even when they are not quite on the side of approbation; and I do it in the firm faith that you have equal greatness of mind to hear them with pleasure.

I had lately the honour of a letter from Dr Moore, where he tells me that he has sent me some books: they are not yet come to hand, but I hear they are on the way.

Wishing you all success in your progress in the path of fame; and that you may equally escape the danger of stumbling through incautious speed, or losing ground through loitering neglect.

R. B.*

* The above letter was addressed to the well-known Helen Maria Williams. The following is her answer:—

"*7th August*, 1789.

"DEAR SIR,—I do not lose a moment in returning you my sincere acknowledgments for your letter, and your criticism on my poem, which is a very flattering proof that you have read it with attention. I think your objections are perfectly just, except in one instance.

"You have indeed been very profuse of panegyric on my little performance. A much less portion of applause from *you*, would have been gratifying to me; since I think its value depends entirely upon the source from whence it proceeds—the incense of praise, like other incense, is more grateful from the quality, than the quantity of the odour.

"I hope you still cultivate the pleasures of poetry, which are precious even independent of the rewards of fame. Perhaps the

No. CLXII.

TO MR JOHN LOGAN.

ELLISLAND, NEAR DUMFRIES, *7th Aug.* 1789.

DEAR SIR,

I INTENDED to have written you long ere now, and as I told you I had gotten three stanzas and a half on my way in a poetic epistle to you; but that old enemy of all *good works*, the devil, threw me into a prosaic mire, and for the soul of me I cannot get out of it. I dare not write you a long letter, as I am going to intrude on your time with a long ballad. I have, as you will shortly see, finished 'The Kirk's Alarm;' but now that it is done, and that I have laughed once or twice at the conceits in some of the stanzas, I am determined not to let it get into the public; so I send you this copy, the first that I have sent to Ayrshire, except some few of the stanzas, which I wrote off in embryo for Gavin Hamilton, under the express provision and request that you will only read it to a few of us, and do not on any account give, or permit to be taken, any copy of the ballad. If I could be of any service to Dr M'Gill, I would do it, though it should be at a much greater expense than irritating a few bigotted priests, but I am afraid serving him in his present *embarras* is a task too hard for me. I have enemies enow, God knows, though I do not wantonly add to the number. Still, as I think there is some merit in two or three of the thoughts, I send it to you as a small, but sincere testimony how much, and with what respectful esteem, I am, dear Sir,

Your obliged humble servant, R. B.*

most valuable property of poetry is its power of disengaging the mind from worldly cares, and leading the imagination to the richest springs of intellectual enjoyment; since, however frequently life may be chequered with gloomy scenes, those who truly love the Muse, can always find one little path adorned with flowers and cheered by sunshine."

* This letter fixes the period when Burns completed 'The Kirk's Alarm.'—M.

No. CLXIII.

TO MRS DUNLOP.

ELLISLAND, 6*th Sept.* 1789.

DEAR MADAM,

I HAVE mentioned in my last, my appointment to the Excise, and the birth of little Frank; who, by the bye, I trust will be no discredit to the honourable name of Wallace, as he has a fine manly countenance, and a figure that might do credit to a little fellow two months older; and likewise an excellent good temper, though when he pleases he has a pipe, only not quite so loud as the horn that his immortal namesake blew as a signal to take out the pin of Stirling bridge.

I had some time ago an epistle, part poetic, and part prosaic, from your poetess, Mrs J. Little, a very ingenious, but modest composition. I should have written her as she requested, but for the hurry of this new business. I have heard of her and her compositions in this country; and I am happy to add, always to the honour of her character. The fact is, I know not well how to write to her: I should sit down to a sheet of paper that I knew not how to stain. I am no dab at fine-drawn letter-writing; and, except when prompted by friendship or gratitude, or, which happens extremely rarely, inspired by the Muse (I know not her name) that presides over epistolary writing, I sit down, when necessitated to write, as I would sit down to beat hemp.*

* Miss Janet Little introduced herself to the Poet's notice by the following epistle. She does not appear to have been gifted with any large portion of poetic inspiration, if we may be allowed to judge from the contents of the volume she has left behind her:—

"LOUDON HOUSE, 12*th July*, 1789.

"SIR,—Though I have not the happiness of being personally acquainted with you, yet, amongst the number of those who have read and admired your publications, may I be permitted to

Some parts of your letter of the 20th August, struck me with the most melancholy concern for the state of your mind at present.

Would I could write you a letter of comfort, I would sit

trouble you with this. You must know, Sir, I am somewhat in love with the Muses, though I cannot boast of any favours they have deigned to confer upon me as yet; my situation in life has been very much against me as to that. I have spent some years in and about Ecclefechan, (where my parents reside,) in the station of a servant, and am now come to Loudon House, at present possessed by Mrs H——: she is daughter to Mrs Dunlop of Dunlop, whom I understand you are particularly acquainted with. As I had the pleasure of perusing your poems, I felt a partiality for the author, which I should not have experienced had you been in a more dignified station. I wrote a few verses of address to you which I did not then think of ever presenting; but as fortune seems to have favoured me in this, by bringing me into a family by whom you are well known and much esteemed, and where perhaps I may have an opportunity of seeing you, I shall, in hopes of your future friendship, take the liberty to transcribe them.

Fair fa' the honest rustic swain,
The pride o' a' our Scottish plain:
Thou gi'es us joy to hear thy strain,
And notes sae sweet:
Old Ramsay's shade reviv'd again
In thee we greet.

Lov'd Thalia, the delightfu' muse,
Seem'd lang shut up as a recluse;
To all she did her aid refuse,
Since Allan's day;
Till Burns arose, then did she chuse
To grace his lay.

To hear thy sang all ranks desire,
Sae weel you strike the dormant lyre;
Apollo with poetic fire
Thy breast does warm;
And critics silently admire
Thy art to charm.

Cæsar and Luath weel can speak,
'Tis pity e'er their gabs should steek,
But into human nature keek,
And knots unravel:

down to it with as much pleasure, as I would to write an epic poem of my own composition, that should equal the *Iliad.* Religion, my dear friend, is the true comfort! A strong persuasion in a future state of existence; a proposi-

To hear their lectures once a week,
Nine miles I'd travel.

Thy dedication to G. H.,
An unco bonnie hamespun speech,
Wi' winsome glee the heart can teach
A better lesson,
Than servile bards, who fawn and fleech
Like beggar's messon.

When slighted love becomes your theme,
And women's faithless vows you blame;
With so much pathos you exclaim,
In your Lament;
But glanc'd by the most frigid dame,
She would relent.

The daisy, too, ye sing wi' skill;
And weel ye praise the whisky gill;
In vain I blunt my feckless quill
Your fame to raise;
While echo sounds from ilka hill,
To Burns's praise.

Did Addison or Pope but hear,
Or Sam, that critic most severe,
A ploughboy sing with throat sae clear,
They, in a rage,
Their works would a' in pieces tear
And curse your page.

Sure Milton's eloquence were faint,
The beauties of your verse to paint;
My rude unpolish'd strokes but taint
Their brilliancy;
Th' attempt would doubtless vex a saint,
And weel may thee.

The task I'll drop, with heart sincere
To heaven present my humble pray'r,
That all the blessings mortals share,
May be by turns

tion so obviously probable, that, setting revelation aside, every nation and people, so far as investigation has reached, for at least near four thousand years, have, in some mode or other, firmly believed it. In vain would we reason and pretend to doubt. I have myself done so to a very daring pitch; but, when I reflected that I was opposing the most ardent wishes, and the most darling hopes of good men, and flying in the face of all human belief, in all ages, I was shocked at my own conduct.

I know not whether I have ever sent you the following lines, or if you have ever seen them; but it is one of my favourite quotations, which I keep constantly by me in my progress through life, in the language of the book of Job,

"Against the day of battle and of war"—

spoken of religion:

"'Tis *this*, my friend, that streaks our morning bright,
'Tis *this* that gilds the horror of our night.
When wealth forsakes us, and when friends are few;
When friends are faithless, or when foes pursue;
'Tis this that wards the blow, or stills the smart,
Disarms affliction, or repels his dart;
Within the breast bids purest raptures rise,
Bids smiling conscience spread her cloudless skies."

Dispens'd by an indulgent care,
To Robert Burns!

"Sir, I hope you will pardon my boldness in this; my hand trembles while I write to you, conscious of my unworthiness of what I would most earnestly solicit, viz. your favour and friendship; yet hoping you will show yourself possessed of as much generosity and good-nature as will prevent your exposing what may justly be found liable to censure in this measure, I shall take the liberty to subscribe myself,

"Sir,
"Your most obedient humble servant,
"JANET LITTLE.

"P. S. If you would condescend to honour me with a few lines from your hand, I would take it as a particular favour: and direct to me at Loudon House, near Galston."

I have been busy with *Zeluco*. The Doctor is so obliging as to request my opinion of it; and I have been revolving in my mind some kind of criticisms on novel-writing, but it is a depth beyond my research. I shall, however, digest my thoughts on the subject as well as I can. *Zeluco* is a most sterling performance.

Farewell! *A Dieu, le bon Dieu, je vous commende!*

No. CLXIV.

TO CAPTAIN RIDDEL, CARSE.

ELLISLAND, *16th Oct.*, 1789.

SIR,

BIG with the idea of this important day at Friars Carse, I have watched the elements and skies in the full persuasion that they would announce it to the astonished world by some phenomena of terrific portent.—Yesternight until a very late hour did I wait with anxious horror for the appearance of some Comet firing half the sky; or aerial armies of sanguinary Scandinavians, darting athwart the startled heavens, rapid as the ragged lightning, and horrid as those convulsions of nature that bury nations.

The elements, however, seem to take the matter very quietly: they did not even usher in this morning with triple suns and a shower of blood, symbolical of the three potent heroes, and the mighty claret-shed of the day.—For me, as Thomson in his Winter says of the storm—I shall "Hear astonished, and astonished sing"

> The whistle and the man; I sing
> The man that won the whistle, &c.

> Here are we met, three merry boys,
> Three merry boys I trow are we;
> And mony a night we've merry been,
> And mony mae we hope to be.

> Wha first shall rise to gang awa,
> A cuckold coward loun is he:

Wha *last* beside his chair shall fa'
He is the king amang us three.

To leave the heights of Parnassus and come to the humble vale of prose.—I have some misgivings that I take too much upon me, when I request you to get your guest, Sir Robert Lawrie, to frank the two inclosed covers for me, the one of them, to Sir William Cunningham, of Robertland, Bart. at Kilmarnock,—the other, to Mr Allan Masterton, Writing-Master, Edinburgh. The first has a kindred claim on Sir Robert, as being a brother Baronet, and likewise a keen Foxite; the other is one of the worthiest men in the world, and a man of real genius; so, allow me to say, he has a fraternal claim on you. I want them franked for to-morrow, as I cannot get them to the post to-night. I shall send a servant again for them in the evening. Wishing that your head may be crowned with laurels to-night, and free from aches to-morrow,

I have the honour to be, Sir,
Your deeply indebted humble Servant,
R. B.

No. CLXV.

TO CAPTAIN RIDDEL.

ELLISLAND, 1789.

SIR,

I WISH from my inmost soul it were in my power to give you a more substantial gratification and return for all the goodness to the poet, than transcribing a few of his idle rhymes.—However, "an old song," though to a proverb an instance of insignificance, is generally the only coin a poet has to pay with.

If my poems which I have transcribed, and mean still to transcribe into your book, were equal to the grateful respect and high esteem I bear for the gentleman to whom I pre-

sent them, they would be the finest poems in the language —As they are, they will at least be a testimony with what sincerity I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your devoted humble Servant,

R. B.

No. CLXVI.

TO MR ROBERT AINSLIE.

ELLISLAND, 1*st Nov.*, 1789.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I HAD written you long ere now, could I have guessed where to find you, for I am sure you have more good sense than to waste the precious days of vacation time in the dirt of business and Edinburgh.—Wherever you are, God bless you, and lead you not into temptation, but deliver you from evil!

I do not know if I have informed you that I am now appointed to an Excise division, in the middle of which my house and farm lie. In this I was extremely lucky. Without ever having been an expectant, as they call their journeymen excisemen, I was directly planted down to all intents and purposes an officer of Excise; there to flourish and bring forth fruits—worthy of repentance.

I know not how the word exciseman, or still more opprobrious, gauger, will sound in your ears. I too have seen the day when my auditory nerves would have felt very delicately on this subject; but a wife and children are things which have a wonderful power in blunting these kind of sensations. Fifty pounds a year for life, and a provision for widows and orphans, you will allow is no bad settlement for a *poet*. For the ignominy of the profession, I have the encouragement which I once heard a recruiting sergeant give to a numerous, if not a respectable audience, in the

streets of Kilmarnock.—"Gentlemen, for your further and better encouragement, I can assure you that our regiment is the most blackguard corps under the crown, and consequently with us an honest fellow has the surest chance for preferment."

You need not doubt that I find several very unpleasant and disagreeable circumstances in my business; but I am tired with and disgusted at the language of complaint against the evils of life. Human existence in the most favourable situations does not abound with pleasures, and has its inconveniences and ills; capricious foolish man mistakes these inconvéniences and ills as if they were the peculiar property of his particular situation; and hence that eternal fickleness, that love of change, which has ruined, and daily does ruin many a fine fellow, as well as many a blockhead, and is almost, without exception, a constant source of disappointment and misery.

I long to hear from you how you go on—not so much in business as in life. Are you pretty well satisfied with your own exertions, and tolerably at ease in your internal reflections? 'Tis much to be a great character as a lawyer, but beyond comparison more to be a great character as a man. That you may be both the one and the other is the earnest wish, and that you *will* be both is the firm persuasion of,

My dear Sir, &c. R. B.

No. CLXVII.

TO MR RICHARD BROWN.

ELLISLAND, *4th November*, 1789.

I HAVE been so hurried, my ever dear friend, that though I got both your letters, I have not been able to command an hour to answer them as I wished; and even now, you are to look on this as merely confessing debt, and craving days. Few things could have given me so much pleasure as the news that you were once more safe and sound on terra

firma, and happy in that place where happiness is alone to be found, in the fireside circle. May the benevolent Director of all things peculiarly bless you in all those endearing connections consequent on the tender and venerable names of husband and father! I have indeed been extremely lucky in getting an additional income of £50 a-year, while, at the same time, the appointment will not cost me above £10 or £12 per annum of expenses more than I must have inevitably incurred. The worst circumstance is, that the Excise division which I have got is so extensive, no less than ten parishes to ride over; and it abounds besides with so much business, that I can scarcely steal a spare moment. However, labour endears rest, and both together are absolutely necessary for the proper enjoyment of human existence. I cannot meet you any where. No less than an order from the Board of Excise, at Edinburgh, is necessary before I can have so much time as to meet you in Ayrshire. But do you come, and see me. We must have a social day, and perhaps lengthen it out with half the night, before you go again to sea. You are the earliest friend I now have on earth, my brothers excepted; and is not that an endearing circumstance? When you and I first met, we were at the green period of human life. The twig would easily take a bent, but would as easily return to its former state. You and I not only took a mutual bent, but, by the melancholy, though strong influence of being both of the family of the unfortunate, we were entwined with one another in our growth towards advanced age; and blasted be the sacrilegious hand that shall attempt to undo the union! You and I must have one bumper to my favourite toast, "May the companions of our youth be the friends of our old age!" Come and see me one year; I shall see you at Port-Glasgow the next, and if we can contrive to have a gossiping between our two bed-fellows, it will be so much additional pleasure. Mrs Burns joins me in kind compliments to you and Mrs Brown. Adieu!

I am ever, my dear Sir, yours, R. B.

No. CLXVIII.

TO R. GRAHAM, ESQ. OF FINTRY.

9th December, 1789.

SIR,

I HAVE a good while had a wish to trouble you with a letter, and had certainly done it long ere now—but for a humiliating something that throws cold water on the resolution, as if one should say, "You have found Mr Graham a very powerful and kind friend indeed, and that interest he is so kindly taking in your concerns, you ought by every thing in your power to keep alive and cherish." Now, though since God has thought proper to make one powerful and another helpless, the connection of obliger and obliged is all fair; and though my being under your patronage is to me highly honourable, yet, Sir, allow me to flatter myself, that, as a poet and an honest man you first interested yourself in my welfare, and principally as such, still you permit me to approach you.

I have found the excise business go on a great deal smoother with me than I expected; owing a good deal to the generous friendship of Mr Mitchel, my collector, and the kind assistance of Mr Findlater, my supervisor. I dare to be honest, and I fear no labour. Nor do I find my hurried life greatly inimical to my correspondence with the Muses. Their visits to me, indeed, and I believe to most of their acquaintance, like the visits of good angels, are short and far between: but I meet them now and then as I jog through the hills of Nithsdale, just as I used to do on the banks of Ayr. I take the liberty to inclose you a few bagatelles, all of them the productions of my leisure thoughts in my excise rides.

If you know or have ever seen Captain Grose, the antiquarian, you will enter into any humour that is in the verses on him. Perhaps you have seen them before, as I

sent them to a London Newspaper. Though I dare say you have none of the solemn-league-and-covenant fire, which shone so conspicuous in Lord George Gordon, and the Kilmarnock weavers, yet I think you must have heard of Dr M'Gill, one of the clergymen of Ayr, and his heretical book. God help him, poor man! Though he is one of the worthiest, as well as one of the ablest of the whole priesthood of the Kirk of Scotland, in every sense of that ambiguous term, yet the poor Doctor and his numerous family are in imminent danger of being thrown out to the mercy of the winter-winds. The inclosed ballad on that business is, I confess, too local, but I laughed myself at some conceits in it, though I am convinced in my conscience that there are a good many heavy stanzas in it too.

The election ballad, as you will see, alludes to the present canvass in our string of boroughs. I do not believe there will be such a hard run match in the whole general election.

I am too little a man to have any political attachments; I am deeply indebted to, and have the warmest veneration for, individuals of both parties; but a man who has it in his power to be the father of a country, and who * * * * *, is a character that one cannot speak of with patience.

Sir J. J. does "what man can do," but yet I doubt his fate.

R. B.

No. CLXIX.

TO MRS DUNLOP.

ELLISLAND, 13*th December*, 1789.

MANY thanks, dear Madam, for your sheet-full of rhymes. Though at present I am below the veriest prose, yet from you every thing pleases. I am groaning under the miseries

of a diseased nervous system; a system, the state of which is most conducive to our happiness—or the most productive of our misery. For now near three weeks I have been so ill with a nervous head-ache, that I have been obliged for a time to give up my excise-books, being scarce able to lift my head, much less to ride once a week over ten muir parishes. What is man?—To day, in the luxuriance of health, exulting in the enjoyment of existence; in a few days, perhaps in a few hours, loaded with conscious painful being, counting the tardy pace of the lingering moments by the repercussions of anguish, and refusing or denied a comforter. Day follows night, and night comes after day, only to curse him with life which gives him no pleasure; and yet the awful, dark termination of that life, is something at which he recoils.

> "Tell us, ye dead; will none of you in pity
> Disclose the secret——————
> *What 'tis you are, and we must shortly be?*
> ——————'tis no matter:
> A little time will make us learn'd as you are."

Can it be possible, that when I resign this frail, feverish being, I shall still find myself in conscious existence? When the last gasp of agony has announced that I am no more to those that knew me, and the few who loved me; when the cold, stiffened, unconscious, ghastly corse is resigned into the earth, to be the prey of unsightly reptiles, and to become in time a trodden clod, shall I be yet warm in life, seeing and seen, enjoying and enjoyed? Ye venerable sages, and holy flamens, is there probability in your conjectures, truth in your stories, of another world beyond death; or are they all alike, baseless visions, and fabricated fables? If there is another life, it must be only for the just, the benevolent, the amiable, and the humane; what a flattering idea, then, is a world to come! Would to God I as firmly believed it, as I ardently wish it! There I should meet an aged parent, now at rest from the many buffetings of an evil world, against which he so long and so bravely struggled. There should I meet the friend, the disinterest-

ed friend of my early life; the man who rejoiced to see me, because he loved me and could serve me.—Muir, thy weaknesses were the aberrations of human nature, but thy heart glowed with every thing generous, manly, and noble; and if ever emanation from the All-good Being animated a human form, it was thine!—There should I, with speechless agony of rapture, again recognise my lost, my ever dear Mary! whose bosom was fraught with truth, honour, constancy, and love.

> "My Mary, dear departed shade!
> Where is thy place of heavenly rest?
> Seest thou thy lover lowly laid?
> Hear'st thou the groans that rend his breast?"

Jesus Christ, thou amiablest of characters! I trust thou art no impostor, and that thy revelation of blissful scenes of existence beyond death and the grave, is not one of the many impositions which time after time have been palmed on credulous mankind. I trust that in thee "shall all the families of the earth be blessed," by being yet connected together in a better world, where every tie that bound heart to heart, in this state of existence, shall be, far beyond our present conceptions, more endearing.

I am a good deal inclined to think with those who maintain, that what are called nervous affections are in fact diseases of the mind. I cannot reason, I cannot think; and but to you I would not venture to write any thing above an order to a cobbler. You have felt too much of the ills of life not to sympathise with a diseased wretch, who has impaired more than half of any faculties he possessed. Your goodness will excuse this distracted scrawl, which the writer dare scarcely read, and which he would throw into the fire, were he able to write any thing better, or indeed any thing at all.

Rumour told me something of a son of yours, who was returned from the East or West Indies. If you have gotten news from James or Anthony, it was cruel in you not to let me know; as I promise you, on the sincerity of a

man, who is weary of one world, and anxious about another, that scarce any thing could give me so much pleasure as to hear of any good thing befalling my honoured friend.

If you have a minute's leisure, take up your pen in pity to *le pauvre miserable* R. B.

No. CLXX.

TO LADY W. M. CONSTABLE.*

ELLISLAND, 16*th December*, 1789.

MY LADY,

IN vain have I from day to day expected to hear from Mrs Young, as she promised me at Dalswinton that she would do me the honour to introduce me at Tiniwald; and it was impossible, not from your Ladyship's accessibility, but from my own feelings, that I could go alone. Lately, indeed, Mr Maxwell of Carruchen in his usual goodness offered to accompany me, when an unlucky indisposition on my part hindered my embracing the opportunity. To court the notice or the tables of the great, except where I sometimes have had a little matter to ask of them, or more often the pleasanter task of witnessing my gratitude to them, is what I never have done, and I trust never shall do. But with your Ladyship, I have the honour to be connected by one of the strongest and most endearing ties in the whole moral world. Common sufferers, in a cause where even to be unfortunate is glorious, the cause of heroic loyalty! Though my fathers had not illustrious honours and vast properties to hazard in the contest, though they

* This letter is for the first time published, and we are indebted to the kindness of Sir Cuthbert Sharpe, Provost of Sunderland, for furnishing us with a copy of it. The verses alluded to in the letter were those addressed to Mr Tytler of Woodhouselie, author of a defence of Mary Queen of Scots, which are inserted in Vol. 2. p. 39.—M.

left their humble cottages only to add so many units more to the unnoted crowd that followed their leaders, yet what they could they did, and what they had they lost: with unshaken firmness and unconcealed political attachments, they shook hands with Ruin for what they esteemed the cause of their king and their country. This language and the inclosed verses are for your Ladyship's eye alone. Poets are not very famous for their prudence; but as I can do nothing for a cause which is now nearly no more, I do not wish to hurt myself.

I have the honour to be,
My Lady,
Your Ladyship's obliged
And obedient humble servant,
R. B.

No. CLXXI.

TO PROVOST MAXWELL, OF LOCHMABEN.

ELLISLAND, 20*th December*, 1789.

DEAR PROVOST,

As my friend Mr Graham goes for your good town tomorrow, I cannot resist the temptation to send you a few lines, and as I have nothing to say, I have chosen this sheet of foolscap, and begun as you see at the top of the first page, because I have ever observed, that when once people have fairly set out they know not where to stop. Now that my first sentence is concluded, I have nothing to do but to pray heaven to help me on to another. Shall I write you on politics or religion, two master subjects for your sayers of nothing. Of the first I dare say by this time you are nearly surfeited: and for the last, whatever they may talk of it, who make it a kind of company concern, I never could endure it beyond a soliloquy. I might write you on farming

on building, on marketing, but my poor distracted mind is so torn, so jaded, so racked and bedeviled with the task of the superlatively damned to make *one guinea do the business of three*, that I detest, abhor, and swoon at the very word business, though no less than four letters of my very short sirname are in it.

Well, to make the matter short, I shall betake myself to a subject ever fruitful of themes; a subject the turtle feast of the sons of Satan, and the delicious secret sugar plum of the babes of grace—a subject sparkling with all the jewels that wit can find in the mines of genius: and pregnant with all the stores of learning from Moses and Confucius to Franklin and Priestley—in short, may it please your Lordship, I intend to write * * *

[*Here the Poet inserted a song which can only be sung at times when the punch bowl has done its duty, and wild wit is set free.*]

If at any time you expect a field-day in your town, a day when dukes, earls, and knights pay their court to weavers, tailors and cobblers, I should like to know of it two or three days before hand. It is not that I care three skips of a cur dog for the politics, but I should like to see such an exhibition of human nature. If you meet with that worthy old veteran in religion and good fellowship, Mr Jeffrey, or any of his amiable family, I beg you will give them my best compliments.

R. B.

No. CLXXII.

TO SIR JOHN SINCLAIR.

1790.

Sir,

The following circumstance has, I believe, been omitted in the statistical account, transmitted to you, of the parish

of Dunscore, in Nithsdale. I beg leave to send it to you, because it is new, and may be useful. How far it is deserving of a place in your patriotic publication, you are the best judge.

To store the minds of the lower classes with useful knowledge, is certainly of very great importance, both to them as individuals, and to society at large. Giving them a turn for reading and reflection, is giving them a source of innocent and laudable amusement; and besides, raises them to a more dignified degree in the scale of rationality. Impressed with this idea, a gentleman in this parish, Robert Riddel, Esq. of Glenriddel, set on foot a species of circulating library, on a plan so simple as to be practicable in any corner of the country; and so useful, as to deserve the notice of every country gentleman, who thinks the improvement of that part of his own species, whom chance has thrown into the humble walks of the peasant and the artizan, a matter worthy of his attention.

Mr Riddel got a number of his own tenants, and farming neighbours, to form themselves into a society for the purpose of having a library among themselves. They entered into a legal engagement to abide by it for three years; with a saving clause or two, in case of removal to a distance, or of death. Each member, at his entry, paid five shillings; and at each of their meetings, which were held every fourth Saturday, sixpence more. With their entry-money, and the credit which they took on the faith of their future funds, they laid in a tolerable stock of books at the commencement. What authors they were to purchase, was always decided by the majority. At every meeting, all the books, under certain fines and forfeitures, by way of penalty, were to be produced; and the members had their choice of the volumes in rotation. He whose name stood for that night, first on the list, had his choice of what volume he pleased in the whole collection; the second had his choice after the first; the third after the second, and so on to the last. At next meeting, he who had been first on the list

at the preceding meeting, was last at this; he who had been second was first; and so on through the whole three years. At the expiration of the engagement, the books were sold by auction, but only among the members themselves; and each man had his share of the common stock, in money or in books, as he chose to be a purchaser or not.

At the breaking up of this little society, which was formed under Mr Riddel's patronage, what with benefactions of books from him, and what with their own purchases, they had collected together upwards of one hundred and fifty volumes. It will easily be guessed, that a good deal of trash would be bought. Among the books, however, of this little library, were, *Blair's Sermons, Robertson's History of Scotland, Hume's History of the Stuarts, The Spectator, Idler, Adventurer, Mirror, Lounger, Observer, Man of Feeling, Man of the World, Chrysal, Don Quixote, Joseph Andrews, &c.* A peasant who can read, and enjoy such books, is certainly a much superior being to his neighbour, who perhaps stalks beside his team, very little removed, except in shape, from the brutes he drives.

Wishing your patriotic exertions their so much merited success,

I am, Sir, your humble servant,

A PEASANT.*

* The above is extracted from the third volume of Sir John Sinclair's Statistics, p. 598.—It was inclosed to Sir John by Mr Riddel himself in the following letter, also printed there:—

"SIR JOHN,

"I inclose you a letter, written by Mr Burns, as an addition to the account of Dunscore parish. It contains an account of a small library which he was so good (at my desire) as to set on foot, in the barony of Monkland, or Friars Carse, in this parish. As its utility has been felt, particularly among the younger class of people, I think, that if a similar plan were established in the different parishes of Scotland, it would tend greatly to the speedy improvement of the tenantry, trades-people, and work-people. Mr Burns was so good as to take the whole charge of this small concern. He was treasurer, librarian, and censor, to this little

No. CLXXIII.

TO CHARLES SHARPE, ESQ. OF HODDAM,

Under a fictitious Signature, inclosing a Ballad,

1790 *or* 1791.

It is true, Sir, you are a gentleman of rank and fortune, and I am a poor devil: you are a feather in the cap of society, and I am a very hobnail in his shoes; yet I have the honour to belong to the same family with you, and on that score I now address you. You will perhaps suspect that I am going to claim affinity with the ancient and honourable house of Kirkpatrick: No, no, Sir: I cannot indeed be properly said to belong to any house, or even any province or kingdom; as my mother, who for many years was spouse to a marching regiment, gave me into this bad world, aboard the packet-boat, somewhere between Donaghadee and Portpatrick. By our common family, I mean, Sir, the family of the Muses. I am a fiddler and a poet; and you, I am told, play an exquisite violin, and have a standard taste in the belles lettres. The other day, a brother catgut gave me a charming Scots air of your composition. If I was pleased with the tune, I was in raptures with the title you have given it; and, taking up the idea, I have spun it into the three stanzas inclosed. Will you allow me, Sir, to present you them, as the dearest offering that a misbegotten son of poverty and rhyme has to give? I have a longing to take you by the hand and unburden my heart by saying, "Sir, I honour you as a man who supports the dignity of human nature, amid an age when frivolity and avarice have, between them, debased us below the brutes that perish!" But, alas, Sir! to me you are unapproachable. It is true,

society, who will long have a grateful sense of his public spirit and exertions for their improvement and information.

I have the honour to be, Sir John,

Yours most sincerely,

Robert Riddel."

the Muses baptized me in Castalian streams; but the thoughtless gipsies forgot to give me a name. As the sex have served many a good fellow, the Nine have given me a great deal of pleasure; but, bewitching jades! they have beggared me. Would they but spare me a little of their cast-linen! Were it only to put it in my power to say, that I have a shirt on my back! But the idle wenches, like Solomon's lilies, "they toil not, neither do they spin;" so I must e'en continue to tie my remnant of a cravat, like the hangman's rope, round my naked throat, and coax my galligaskins to keep together their many-coloured fragments. As to the affair of shoes, I have given that up. My pilgrimages in my ballad-trade, from town to town, and on your stony-hearted turnpikes too, are what not even the hide of Job's behemoth could bear. The coat on my back is no more: I shall not speak evil of the dead. It would be equally unhandsome and ungrateful to find fault with my old surtout, which so kindly supplies and conceals the want of that coat. My hat indeed is a great favourite; and though I got it literally for an old song, I would not exchange it for the best beaver in Britain. I was, during several years, a kind of fac-totum servant to a country clergyman, where I picked up a good many scraps of learning, particularly in some branches of the mathematics. Whenever I feel inclined to rest myself on my way, I take my seat under a hedge, laying my poetic wallet on the one side, and my fiddle-case on the other, and placing my hat between my legs, I can by means of its brim, or rather brims, go through the whole doctrine of the Conic Sections.

However, Sir, don't let me mislead you, as if I would interest your pity. Fortune has so much forsaken me, that she has taught me to live without her; and, amid all my rags and poverty, I am as independent, and much more happy, than a monarch of the world. According to the hackneyed metaphor, I value the several actors in the great drama of life, simply as they act their parts. I can look on a worthless fellow of a duke with unqualified contempt, and

can regard an honest scavenger with sincere respect. As you, Sir, go through your rôle with such distinguished merit, permit me to make one in the chorus of universal applause, and assure you that with the highest respect,

I have the honour to be, &c.

No. CLXXIV.

TO MR GILBERT BURNS.

ELLISLAND, 11*th January*, 1790.

DEAR BROTHER,

I MEAN to take advantage of the frank, though I have not in my present frame of mind much appetite for exertion in writing. My nerves are in a damned state. I feel that horrid hypochondria pervading every atom of both body and soul. This farm has undone my enjoyment of myself. It is a ruinous affair on all hands. But let it go to hell! I'll fight it out and be off with it.

We have gotten a set of very decent players here just now. I have seen them an evening or two. David Campbell, in Ayr, wrote to me by the manager of the company, a Mr Sutherland, who is a man of apparent worth. On New-year-day evening I gave him the following prologue, which he spouted to his audience with applause :—

> No song nor dance I bring from yon great city,
> That queens it o'er our taste—the more's the pity:
> Tho' by the bye, abroad why will you roam?
> Good sense and taste are natives here at home.
> (*Vide* vol. ii. p. 19.)

I can no more.—If once I was clear of this damned farm, I should respire more at ease.

No. CLXXV.

TO WILLIAM DUNBAR, W. S.

ELLISLAND, 14*th Jan.*, 1790.

SINCE we are here creatures of a day, since "a few summer days, and a few winter nights, and the life of man is at an end," why, my dear much esteemed Sir, should you and I let negligent indolence, for I know it is nothing worse, step in between us and bar the enjoyment of a mutual correspondence? We are not shapen out of the common, heavy, methodical clod, the elemental stuff of the plodding selfish race, the sons of Arithmetic and Prudence; our feelings and hearts are not benumbed and poisoned by the cursed influence of riches, which, whatever blessing they may be in other respects, are no friends to the nobler qualities of the heart; in the name of random sensibility, then, let never the moon change on our silence any more.—I have had a tract of bad health most part of this winter, else you had heard from me long ere now.—Thank heaven, I am now got so much better as to be able to partake a little in the enjoyments of life.

Our friend, Cunningham, will perhaps have told you of my going into the Excise.—The truth is, I found it a very convenient business to have £50 per annum, nor have I yet felt any of these mortifying circumstances in it that I was led to fear.

Feb. 2*d.*—I have not for sheer hurry of business been able to spare five minutes to finish my letter.—Besides my farm business, I ride on my Excise matters at least 200 miles every week.—I have not by any means given up the Muses.—You will see in the 3d vol. of Johnson's Scots songs that I have contributed my mite there.

But, my dear Sir, little ones that look up to you for paternal protection, are an important charge.—I have already two fine healthy stout little fellows, and I wish to throw some light upon them.—I have a thousand reveries and

schemes about them, and their future destiny. Not that I am an Utopian projector in these things. I am resolved never to breed up a son of mine to any of the learned professions.—I know the value of independence; and since I cannot give my sons an independent fortune, I shall give them an independent line of life.—What a chaos of hurry, chance, and changes is this world, when one sits soberly down to reflect on it!—To a father, who himself knows the world, the thought that he shall have sons to usher into it, must fill him with dread; but if he have daughters, the prospect in a thoughtful moment is apt to shock him.

I hope Mrs Fordyce and the two young ladies are well. Do let me forget that they are nieces of yours, and let me say that I never saw a more interesting, sweeter pair of sisters in my life. I am the fool of my feelings and attachments.—I often take up a volume of my Spencer to realize you to my imagination, and think over the social scenes we have had together.—God grant that there may be another world more congenial to honest fellows beyond this. A world where these rubs and plagues of absence, distance, misfortunes, ill health, &c. shall no more damp hilarity and divide friendship. This I know is your throng season, but half a page will much oblige, my dear Sir,

Yours Sincerely,

R. B.

No. CLXXVI.

TO MRS DUNLOP.

ELLISLAND, *25th January*, 1790.

IT has been owing to unremitting hurry of business that I have not written to you, Madam, long ere now. My health is greatly better, and I now begin once more to share in satisfaction and enjoyment with the rest of my fellow-creatures.

Many thanks, my much esteemed friend, for your kind letters; but why will you make me run the risk of being contemptible and mercenary in my own eyes? When I pique myself on my independent spirit, I hope it is neither poetic licence, nor poetic rant: and I am so flattered with the honour you have done me, in making me your compeer in friendship and friendly correspondence, that I cannot without pain, and a degree of mortification, be reminded of the real inequality between our situations.

Most sincerely do I rejoice with you, dear Madam, in the good news of Anthony. Not only your anxiety about his fate, but my own esteem for such a noble, warm-hearted, manly young fellow, in the little I had of his acquaintance, has interested me deeply in his fortunes.

Falconer, the unfortunate author of the 'Shipwreck,' which you so much admire, is no more. After witnessing the dreadful catastrophe he so feelingly describes in his poem, and after weathering many hard gales of fortune, he went to the bottom with the Aurora frigate!

I forget what part of Scotland had the honour of giving him birth; but he was the son of obscurity and misfortune.*

* Falconer was in early life a sea-boy, to use a word of Shakspeare, on board a man-of-war, in which capacity he attracted the notice of Campbell, the author of the satire on Dr Johnson, entitled 'Lexiphanes,' then purser of the ship. Campbell took him as his servant, and delighted in giving him instruction; and, when Falconer afterwards acquired celebrity, boasted of him as his scholar. The Editor had this information from a surgeon of a man-of-war, in 1777, who knew both Campbell and Falconer, and who himself perished soon after by shipwreck on the coast of America.

Though the death of Falconer happened so lately as 1770 or 1771, yet in the biography prefixed by Dr Anderson to his works, in the complete edition of the 'Poets of Great Britain' it is said—"Of the family, birth-place, and education of William Falconer, there are no memorials." On the authority already given, it may be mentioned, that he was a native of one of the towns on the coast of Fife; and that his parents, who had suffered some misfortunes, removed to one of the sea-ports of England, where they both died soon after of an epidemic fever, leaving poor Falconer, then a boy, forlorn and destitute. In consequence of which he

He was one of those daring adventurous spirits, which Scotland, beyond any other country, is remarkable for producing. Little does the fond mother think, as she hangs delighted over the sweet little leech at her bosom, where the poor fellow may hereafter wander, and what may be his fate. I remember a stanza in an old Scottish ballad, which, notwithstanding its rude simplicity, speaks feelingly to the heart :—

"Little did my mother think,
That day she cradled me,
What land I was to travel in,
Or what death I should die !"*

Old Scottish songs are, you know, a favourite study and pursuit of mine, and now I am on that subject, allow me to give you two stanzas of another old simple ballad, which I am sure will please you. The catastrophe of the piece is a poor ruined female, lamenting her fate. She concludes with this pathetic wish :—

entered on board a man-of-war. These last circumstances are, however, less certain.—*Currie.*

"Currie seems to have been imperfectly acquainted with the chequered life and fortunes of Falconer. His parentage was humble, but his education was above the common : he displayed his poetic talents at an early age in a poem published, in 1751, in memory of Frederick Prince of Wales : the Shipwreck, by which his name will be known to posterity, appeared in 1762, and obtained for him the notice of the Duke of York. His Marine Dictionary, printed in 1769, introduced his name to many on whom the pathos of his poetry was lost : nor should it be forgotten, that before he sailed on his last fatal expedition, he wrote a poem called the Demagogue, in which he satirized with skill, as well as bitterness, one of the profligate patriots of the day."—*Cunningham.*

* This touching sentiment occurs in the ballad of the 'Queen's Marie,' or as some sets have it, 'Mary Hamilton.' One stanza will indicate the ballad to which we allude ; it is this :—

Yestreen the queen had four Maries,
This day she'll have but three ;
There was Mary Seaton, and Mary Beaton,
And Mary Carmichael and me.

Various sets of the ballad are in existence, for which we refer to the Border Minstrelsy, C. K. Sharpe's Ballad-book, and Minstrelsy Ancient and Modern.—M.

"O that my father had ne'er on me smil'd;
O that my mother had ne'er to me sung!
O that my cradle had never been rock'd;
But that I had died when I was young!

O that the grave it were my bed;
My blankets were my winding sheet;
The clocks and the worms my bedfellows a';
And O sae sound as I should sleep!"*

I do not remember in all my reading to have met with any thing more truly the language of misery, than the exclamation in the last line. Misery is like love; to speak its language truly, the author must have felt it.

I am every day expecting the doctor to give your little godson† the small-pox. They are *rife* in the country, and I tremble for his fate. By the way, I cannot help congratulating you on his looks and spirit. Every person who sees him, acknowledges him to be the finest, handsomest child he has ever seen. I am myself delighted with the manly swell of his little chest, and a certain miniature dignity in the carriage of his head, and the glance of his fine black eye, which promise the undaunted gallantry of an independent mind.

I thought to have sent you some rhymes, but time forbids. I promise you poetry until you are tired of it, next time I have the honour of assuring you how truly I am, &c.

R. B.

* We are not aware of the ballad of which these lines are a fragment, but we have no doubt of their genuineness, and we fully accord in the justness of the poet's observations upon them. —M.

† The bard's second son, Francis.

No. CLXXVII.

TO MR PETER HILL,

BOOKSELLER, EDINBURGH.

ELLISLAND, 2*d Feb.*, 1790.

No! I will not say one word about apologies or excuses for not writing—I am a poor, rascally gauger, condemned to gallop at least 200 miles every week to inspect dirty ponds and yeasty barrels, and where can I find time to write to, or importance to interest any body? The upbraidings of my conscience, nay the upbraidings of my wife, have persecuted me on your account these two or three months past. I wish to God I was a great man, that my correspondence might throw light upon you, to let the world see what you really are: and then I would make your fortune, without putting my hand in my pocket for you, which, like all other great men, I suppose I would avoid as much as possible. What are you doing, and how are you doing? Have you lately seen any of my few friends? What has become of the BOROUGH REFORM, or how is the fate of my poor namesake Mademoiselle Burns decided? O man! but for thee and thy selfish appetites, and dishonest artifices, that beauteous form, and that once innocent and still ingenuous mind, might have shone conspicuous and lovely in the faithful wife, and the affectionate mother; and shall the unfortunate sacrifice to thy pleasures have no claim on thy humanity!

I saw lately, in a review, some extracts from a new poem, called the 'Village Curate;' send it me, I want likewise a cheap copy of 'The World.' Mr Armstrong, the young poet, who does me the honour to mention me so kindly in his works, please give him my best thanks for the copy of his book.—I shall write him, my first leisure hour. I like his poetry much, but I think his style in prose quite astonishing.

Your book came safe, and I am going to trouble you with farther commissions. I call it troubling you—because I want only, BOOKS; the cheapest way, the best; so you may have to hunt for them in the evening auctions. I want Smollett's Works, for the sake of his incomparable humour. I have already Roderick Random, and Humphrey Clinker.—Peregrine Pickle, Launcelot Greaves, and Ferdinand, Count Fathom, I still want; but as I said, the veriest ordinary copies will serve me. I am nice only in the appearance of my poets. I forget the price of Cowper's Poems, but, I believe, I must have them. I saw the other day, proposals for a publication, entitled, 'Banks's new and complete Christian's Family Bible,' printed for C. Cooke, Paternoster-row, London. He promises at least, to give in the work, I think it is three hundred and odd engravings, to which he has put the names of the first artists in London.*—You will know the character of the performance, as some numbers of it are published: and if it is really what it pretends to be, set me down as a subscriber, and send me the published numbers.

Let me hear from you, your first leisure minute, and trust me you shall in future have no reason to complain of my silence. The dazzling perplexity of novelty will dissi-

* Perhaps no set of men more effectually avail themselves of the easy credulity of the public, than a certain description of Paternoster-row booksellers. Three hundred and odd engravings!—and by the first artists in London, too!—no wonder that Burns was dazzled by the splendour of the promise. It is no unusual thing for this class of impostors to illustrate the Holy Scriptures by plates originally engraved for the History of England, and I have actually seen subjects designed by our celebrated artist Stothard, from Clarissa Harlowe and the Novelist's Magazine, converted, with incredible dexterity, by these Bookselling-Breslaws, into Scriptural embellishments! One of these venders of 'Family Bibles' lately called on me, to consult me professionally about a folio engraving he brought with him.—It represented Mons. Buffon, seated, contemplating various groups of animals that surrounded him: he merely wished, he said, to be informed, whether by unclothing the Naturalist, and giving him a rather more resolute look, the plate could not, at a trifling expense, be made to pass for "Daniel in the Lions' Den!"—*Cromek.*

pate and leave me to pursue my course in the quiet path of methodical routine. R. B.

No. CLXXVIII.

TO MR W. NICOL.

ELLISLAND, *Feb.* 9, 1790.

MY DEAR SIR,

THAT damned mare of yours is dead. I would freely have given her price to have saved her; she has vexed me beyond description. Indebted as I was to your goodness beyond what I can ever repay, I eagerly grasped at your offer to have the mare with me. That I might at least show my readiness in wishing to be grateful, I took every care of her in my power. She was never crossed for riding above half a score of times by me or in my keeping. I drew her in the plough, one of three, for one poor week. I refused fifty-five shillings for her, which was the highest bode I could squeeze for her. I fed her up and had her in fine order for Dumfries fair; when four or five days before the fair, she was seized with an unaccountable disorder in the sinews, or somewhere in the bones of the neck; with a weakness or total want of power in her fillets, and in short the whole vertebræ of her spine seemed to be diseased and unhinged, and in eight and forty hours, in spite of the two best farriers in the country, she died and be damned to her! The farriers said that she had been quite strained in the fillets beyond cure before you had bought her; and that the poor devil, though she might keep a little flesh, had been jaded and quite worn out with fatigue and oppression. While she was with me, she was under my own eye, and I assure you, my much valued friend, every thing was done for her that could be done; and the accident has vexed me to the heart. In fact I could not pluck up spirits to write to you, on account of the unfortunate business.

There is little new in this country. Our theatrical company, of which you must have heard, leave us this week. Their merit and character are indeed very great, both on the stage and in private life; not a worthless creature among them; and their encouragement has been accordingly. Their usual run is from eighteen to twenty-five pounds a night: seldom less than the one, and the house will hold no more than the other. There have been repeated instances of sending away six, and eight, and ten pounds a night for want of room. A new theatre is to be built by subscription; the first stone is to be laid on Friday first to come. Three hundred guineas have been raised by thirty subscribers, and thirty more might have been got if wanted. The manager, Mr Sutherland, was introduced to me by a friend from Ayr; and a worthier or cleverer fellow I have rarely met with. Some of our clergy have slipt in by stealth now and then; but they have got up a farce of their own. You must have heard how the Rev. Mr Lawson of Kirkmahoe, seconded by the Rev. Mr Kirkpatrick of Dunscore, and the rest of that faction, have accused in formal process, the unfortunate and Rev. Mr Heron of Kirkgunzeon, that in ordaining Mr Nielson to the cure of souls in Kirkbean, he, the said Heron, feloniously and treasonably bound the said Nielson to the confession of faith, *so far as it was agreeable to reason and the word of God!*

Mrs B. begs to be remembered most gratefully to you. Little Bobby and Frank are charmingly well and healthy. I am jaded to death with fatigue. For these two or three months, on an average, I have not ridden less than two hundred miles per week. I have done little in the poetic way. I have given Mr Sutherland two Prologues; one of which was delivered last week. I have likewise strung four or five barbarous stanzas, to the tune of Chevy Chase, by way of Elegy on your poor unfortunate mare, beginning (the name she got here was Peg Nicholson)

"Peg Nicholson was a good bay mare,
As ever trod on airn;
But now she's floating down the Nith,
And past the mouth o' Cairn."

[*See Vol.* II. *page* 51.]

My best compliments to Mrs Nicol, and little Neddy, and all the family; I hope Ned is a good scholar, and will come out to gather nuts and apples with me next harvest.

R. B.

No. CLXXIX.

TO MR CUNNINGHAM.*

ELLISLAND, 13*th February*, 1790.

I BEG your pardon, my dear and much valued friend, for writing to you on this very unfashionable, unsightly sheet—

"My poverty but not my will consents."

But to make amends, since of modish post I have none, except one poor widowed half-sheet of gilt, which lies in my drawer, among my plebeian foolscap pages, like the widow of a man of fashion, whom that unpolite scoundrel, Necessity, has driven from Burgundy and Pineapple, to a

* We insert the following letter from Mr Cunningham, which appears in Dr Currie's edition of Burns, and will be perused with some interest. In the copy before us there is the following note. "The original of this is certainly mine, but does me no credit. A. Cunningham:—EDINBURGH, 22*d October*, 1809."

"28*th January*, 1790.

"IN some instances it is reckoned unpardonable to quote any one's own words; but the value I have for your friendship nothing can more truly or more elegantly express than

'Time but the impression stronger makes,
As streams their channels deeper wear.'

"Having written to you twice without having heard from you, I am apt to think my letters have miscarried. My conjecture is only framed upon the chapter of accidents turning up against me, as it too often does, in the trivial, and, I may with truth add, the

dish of Bohea, with the scandal-bearing help-mate of a village-priest; or a glass of whisky-toddy, with a ruby-nosed yoke-fellow of a foot-padding exciseman—I make a vow to inclose this sheet-full of epistolary fragments in that my only scrap of gilt paper.

I am indeed your unworthy debtor for three friendly letters. I ought to have written to you long ere now, but it is a literal fact, I have scarcely a spare moment. It is not that I *will not* write to you: Miss Burnet is not more dear to her guardian angel, nor his grace the Duke of Queensberry to the powers of darkness, than my friend Cunningham to me. It is not that I *cannot* write to you; should you doubt it, take the following fragment, which was intended for you some time ago, and be convinced that I can *antithesize* sentiment, and *circumvolute* periods, as well as any coiner of phrase in the regions of philology.

December, 1789.

MY DEAR CUNNINGHAM,

WHERE are you? And what are you doing? Can you be that son of levity, who takes up a friendship as he takes up a fashion; or are you, like some other of the worthiest fellows in the world, the victim of indolence, laden with fetters of ever-increasing weight?

What strange beings we are! Since we have a portion

more important affairs of life; but I shall continue occasionally to inform you what is going on among the circle of your friends in these parts. In these days of merriment, I have frequently heard your name *proclaimed* at the jovial-board—under the roof of our hospitable friend at Stenhouse-mills; there were no

'Lingering moments number'd with care.'

"I saw your 'Address to the New-year,' in the Dumfries Journal. Of your productions I shall say nothing; but my acquaintances allege that when your name is mentioned, which every man of celebrity must know often happens, I am the champion, the Mendoza, against all snarling critics and narrow-minded reptiles, of whom *a few* on this planet do *crawl*.

"With best compliments to your wife, and her black-eyed sister, I remain yours," &c.

carrier), 'Knox's History of the Reformation;' 'Rae's History of the Rebellion in 1715;' any good History of the Rebellion in 1745; 'A Display of the Secession Act and Testimony, by Mr Gib;' 'Hervey's Meditations;' 'Beveridge's Thoughts;' and another copy of 'Watson's Body of Divinity.'

I wrote to Mr A. Masterton three or four months ago, to pay some money he owed me into your hands, and lately I wrote to you to the same purpose, but I have heard from neither one nor other of you.

In addition to the books I commissioned in my last, I want very much, An Index to the Excise Laws, or an Abridgment of all the statutes now in force, relative to the Excise, by Jellinger Symons; I want three copies of this book: if it is now to be had, cheap or dear, get it for me. An honest country neighbour of mine wants too a Family Bible, the larger the better, but second-handed, for he does not choose to give above ten shillings for the book. I want likewise for myself, as you can pick them up, second-handed or cheap, copies of Otway's Dramatic Works, Ben Jonson's, Dryden's, Congreve's, Wycherley's, Vanbrugh's, Cibber's, or any Dramatic Works of the more modern, Macklin, Garrick, Foote, Colman, or Sheridan. A good copy too of Moliere, in French, I much want. Any other good dramatic authors in that language I want also; but comic authors chiefly, though I should wish to have Racine, Corneille, and Voltaire too. I am in no hurry for all, or any of these, but if you accidentally meet with them very cheap, get them for me.

And now, to quit the dry walk of business, how do you do, my dear friend? and how is Mrs Hill? I trust, if now and then not so *elegantly* handsome, at least as amiable, and sings as divinely as ever. My good wife too has a charming "wood-note wild;" now could we four ———.

I am out of all patience with this vile world, for one thing. Mankind are by nature benevolent creatures, except in a few scoundrelly instances. I do not think that

avarice of the good things we chance to have, is born with us: but we are placed here amid so much nakedness, and hunger, and poverty, and want, that we are under a cursed necessity of studying selfishness, in order that we may EXIST! Still there are, in every age, a few souls, that all the wants and woes of life cannot debase to selfishness, or even to the necessary alloy of caution and prudence. If ever I am in danger of vanity, it is when I contemplate myself on this side of my disposition and character. God knows I am no saint; I have a whole host of follies and sins to answer for; but if I could, and I believe I do it as far as I can, I would wipe away all tears from all eyes. Adieu!

R. B.

No. CLXXXI.

TO MRS DUNLOP.

ELLISLAND, 10*th April*, 1790.

I HAVE just now, my ever honoured friend, enjoyed a very high luxury, in reading a paper of the Lounger. You know my national prejudices. I had often read and admired the Spectator, Adventurer, Rambler, and World; but still with a certain regret, that they were so thoroughly and entirely English. Alas! have I often said to myself, what are all the boasted advantages which my country reaps from the union, that can counterbalance the annihilation of her independence, and even her very name! I often repeat that couplet of my favourite poet, Goldsmith—

> "——— States of native liberty possest,
> Tho' very poor, may yet be very blest."

Nothing can reconcile me to the common terms, "English ambassador, English court," &c. And I am out of all patience to see that equivocal character, Hastings, im-

peached by "the Commons of England." Tell me, my friend, is this weak prejudice? I believe in my conscience such ideas as "my country; her independence; her honour; the illustrious names that mark the history of my native land;" &c.—I believe these, among your *men of the world*, men who, in fact, guide for the most part and govern our world, are looked on as so many modifications of wrong-headedness. They know the use of bawling out such terms, to rouse or lead THE RABBLE; but for their own private use, with almost all the *able statesmen* that ever existed, or now exist, when they talk of right and wrong they only mean proper and improper; and their measure, of conduct is, not what they OUGHT, but what they DARE. For the truth of this I shall not ransack the history of nations, but appeal to one of the ablest judges of men that ever lived—the celebrated earl of Chesterfield. In fact, a man who could thoroughly control his vices whenever they interfered with his interests, and who could completely put on the appearance of every virtue as often as it suited his purposes, is, on the Stanhopian plan, the *perfect man;* a man to lead nations. But are great abilities, complete without a flaw, and polished without a blemish, the standard of human excellence? This is certainly the staunch opinion of *men of the world;* but I call on honour, virtue, and worth, to give the Stygian doctrine a loud negative! However, this must be allowed, that, if you abstract from man the idea of an existence beyond the grave, *then*, the true measure of human conduct is, *proper* and *improper:* virtue and vice, as dispositions of the heart, are, in that case, of scarcely the same import and value to the world at large, as harmony and discord in the modifications of sound; and a delicate sense of honour, like a nice ear for music, though it may sometimes give the possessor an ecstacy unknown to the coarser organs of the herd, yet, considering the harsh gratings, and inharmonic jars, in this ill-tuned state of being, it is odds but the individual would be as happy, and certainly would be as much respected by the true judges of

society as it would then stand, without either a good ear or a good heart.

You must know I have just met with the Mirror and Lounger for the first time, and I am quite in raptures with them; I should be glad to have your opinion of some of the papers. The one I have just read, Lounger, No. 61, has cost me more honest tears than any thing I have read of a long time. Mackenzie has been called the Addison of the Scots, and in my opinion, Addison would not be hurt at the comparison. If he has not Addison's exquisite humour, he as certainly outdoes him in the tender and the pathetic. His Man of Feeling (but I am not counsel learned in the laws of criticism) I estimate as the first performance in its kind I ever saw. From what book, moral or even pious, will the susceptible young mind receive impressions more congenial to humanity and kindness, generosity and benevolence; in short, more of all that ennobles the soul to herself, or endears her to others—than from the simple affecting tale of poor Harley?

Still, with all my admiration of Mackenzie's writings, I do not know if they are the fittest reading for a young man who is about to set out, as the phrase is, to make his way into life. Do not you think, Madam, that among the few favoured of Heaven in the structure of their minds, (for such there certainly are,) there may be a purity, a tenderness, a dignity, an elegance of soul, which are of no use, nay, in some degree, absolutely disqualifying for the truly important business of making a man's way into life? If I am not much mistaken, my gallant young friend, A******, is very much under these disqualifications; and for the young females of a family I could mention, well may they excite parental solicitude, for I, a common acquaintance, or as my vanity will have it, an humble friend, have often trembled for a turn of mind which may render them eminently happy—or peculiarly miserable!

I have been manufacturing some verses lately; but as I have got the most hurried season of Excise business over,

I hope to have more leisure to transcribe any thing that may show how much I have the honour to be, Madam,

Yours, &c. R. B.

No. CLXXXII.

TO COLLECTOR MITCHELL.*

ELLISLAND, 1790.

SIR,

I SHALL not fail to wait on Captain Riddel to-night—I wish and pray that the goddess of justice herself would appear to-morrow among our hon. gentlemen, merely to give them a word in their ear that mercy to the thief is injustice to the honest man. For my part I have galloped over my ten parishes these four days, until this moment that I am just alighted, or rather, that my poor jackass-skeleton of a horse has let me down; for the miserable devil has been on his knees half a score of times within the last twenty miles, telling me in his own way, "Behold, am not I thy faithful jade of a horse, on which thou hast ridden these many years!"

In short, Sir, I have broke my horse's wind, and almost broke my own neck, besides some injuries in a part that shall be nameless, owing to a hard-hearted stone of a saddle. I find that every offender has so many great men to espouse his cause, that I shall not be surprised if I am not committed to the strong hold of the law to-morrow for insolence to the dear friends of the gentlemen of the country.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your obliged and obedient humble

R. B.

* For this letter we are indebted to the kindness of Collector Campbell, grandson to Mr Mitchell, the gentleman to whom it is addressed.—M.

No. CLXXXIII.

TO DR MOORE.

DUMFRIES, *Excise-Office, 14th July*, 1790.

SIR,

COMING into town this morning, to attend my duty in this office, it being collection-day, I met with a gentleman who tells me he is on his way to London; so I take the opportunity of writing to you, as franking is at present under a temporary death. I shall have some snatches of leisure through the day, amid our horrid business and bustle, and I shall improve them as well as I can; but let my letter be as stupid as *********, as miscellaneous as a newspaper, as short as a hungry grace-before-meat, or as long as a law-paper in the Douglas cause; as ill spelt as country John's billet-doux, or as unsightly a scrawl as Betty Byre-Mucker's answer to it; I hope, considering circumstances, you will forgive it; and as it will put you to no expense of postage, I shall have the less reflection about it.

I am sadly ungrateful in not returning you my thanks for your most valuable present, *Zeluco*. In fact, you are in some degree blameable for my neglect. You were pleased to express a wish for my opinion of the work, which so flattered me, that nothing less would serve my over-weening fancy, than a formal criticism on the book. In fact, I have gravely planned a comparative view of you, Fielding, Richardson, and Smollett, in your different qualities and merits as novel-writers. This, I own, betrays my ridiculous vanity, and I may probably never bring the business to bear; but I am fond of the spirit young Elihu shows in the book of Job—"And I said, I will also declare my opinion." I have quite disfigured my copy of the book with my annotations. I never take it up without at the

same time taking my pencil, and marking with asterisms, parentheses, &c. wherever I meet with an original thought, a nervous remark on life and manners, a remarkable well-turned period, or a character sketched with uncommon precision.

Though I should hardly think of fairly writing out my "Comparative View," I shall certainly trouble you with my remarks, such as they are.

I have just received from my gentleman that horrid summons in the book of Revelation—"That time shall be no more!"

The little collection of sonnets have some charming poetry in them. If *indeed* I am indebted to the fair author for the book, and not, as I rather suspect, to a celebrated author of the other sex, I should certainly have written to the lady, with my grateful acknowledgments, and my own ideas of the comparative excellence of her pieces. I would do this last, not from any vanity of thinking that my remarks could be of much consequence to Mrs Smith, but merely from my own feelings as an author, doing as I would be done by.

R. B.*

* "The Sonnets to which Burns alludes were those of Charlotte Smith: the volume which belonged to the poet is now before me; one note alone intimates that the book passed through his hands; the fair authoress, in giving the source of line 14, in the 8th sonnet—

'Have power to cure all sadness but despair,'

quotes Milton—

'Vernal delight and joy, able to drive
All sadness but despair.'

To this Burns added with the pen,

'He sang sae sweet as might dispel
A' rage but fell despair.'

These lines are to be found in one version at least of the fine ballad of Gil Morrice."—*Cunningham.*

The above note is rather curious, as it shows the poet has had little antiquarian discrimination in distinguishing what were the

No. CLXXXV.

TO MR MURDOCH,

TEACHER OF FRENCH, LONDON.

ELLISLAND, *July 16th*, 1790.

MY DEAR SIR,

I RECEIVED a letter from you a long time ago, but unfortunately, as it was in the time of my peregrinations and journeyings through Scotland, I mislaid or lost it, and by consequence your direction along with it. Luckily my good star brought me acquainted with Mr Kennedy, who, I understand, is an acquaintance of yours: and by his means and mediation I hope to replace that link which my unfortunate negligence had so unluckily broke in the chain of our correspondence. I was the more vexed at the vile accident, as my brother William, a journeyman saddler, has been for some time in London; and wished above all things for your direction, that he might have paid his respects to his father's friend.

His last address he sent me was, "Wm. Burns, at Mr Barber's, saddler, No. 181, Strand." I writ him by Mr Kennedy, but neglected to ask him for your address; so, if you find a spare half minute, please let my brother know by a card where and when he will find you, and the poor fellow will joyfully wait on you, as one of the few surviving friends of the man whose name, and Christian name too, he has the honour to bear.

The next letter I write you shall be a long one. I have

genuine portions from the modern interpolations which so frequently, and so very inartificially, occur in most of our old Scottish traditionary ballads and songs. Burns has quoted a passage from Gil Morrice, which every sound poetical antiquary has rejected as spurious, and which occurs in no early traditionary set of that far-famed ballad. When we come to the poet's remarks on Scottish songs, we may perhaps have an opportunity of elucidating this point at more length.—M.

much to tell you of "hair-breadth 'scapes in th' imminent deadly breach," with all the eventful history of a life, the early years of which owed so much to your kind tutorage; but this at an hour of leisure. My kindest compliments to Mrs Murdoch and family.

I am ever, my dear Sir,
Your obliged friend, R. B.*

* This letter was communicated to the Editor by a gentleman, to whose liberal advice and information he is much indebted, Mr John Murdoch, the tutor of the poet; accompanied by the following interesting note.

LONDON, HART-STREET, BLOOMSBURY, 28*th Dec.* 1807.

DEAR SIR,—The following letter, which I lately found among my papers, I copy for your perusal, partly because it is Burns's, partly because it makes honourable mention of my rational Christian friend, his father; and likewise because it is rather flattering to myself. I glory in no one thing so much as an intimacy with good men:—the friendship of others reflects no honour. When I recollect the pleasure, (and I hope benefit,) I received from the conversation of WILLIAM BURNS, especially when on the Lord's day we walked together for about two miles, to the house of prayer, there publicly to adore and praise the Giver of all good, I entertain an ardent hope, that together we shall "renew the glorious theme in distant worlds," with powers more adequate to the mighty subject, THE EXUBERANT BENEFICENCE OF THE GREAT CREATOR. But to the letter:—[*Here follows the letter relative to young Wm. Burns.*]

I promised myself a deal of happiness in the conversation of my dear young friend; but my promises of this nature generally prove fallacious. Two visits were the utmost that I received. At one of them, however, he repeated a lesson which I had given him about twenty years before, when he was a mere child, concerning the pity and tenderness due to animals. To that lesson, (which it seems was brought to the level of his capacity,) he declared himself indebted for almost all the philanthropy he possessed.

Let not parents and teachers imagine that it is needless to talk seriously to children. They are sooner fit to be reasoned with than is generally thought. Strong and indelible impressions are to be made before the mind be agitated and ruffled by the numerous train of distracting cares and unruly passions, whereby it is frequently rendered almost unsusceptible of the principles and precepts of rational religion and sound morality.

But I find myself digressing again. Poor William! then in the bloom and vigour of youth, caught a putrid fever, and, in a

No. CLXXXV.

TO MR M'MURDO.

ELLISLAND, 2*d August*, 1790.

SIR,

Now that you are over with the sirens of Flattery, the harpies of Corruption, and the furies of Ambition, these infernal deities, that on all sides, and in all parties, preside over the villanous business of politics, permit a rustic muse of your acquaintance to do her best to soothe you with a song.—

You knew Henderson—I have not flattered his memory.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your obliged humble servant,

R. B.

No. CLXXXVI.

TO MRS DUNLOP.

8*th August*, 1790.

DEAR MADAM,

AFTER a long day's toil, plague, and care, I sit down to write to you. Ask me not why I have delayed it so long? It was owing to hurry, indolence, and fifty other things; in short to any thing—but forgetfulness of *la plus aimable de son sexe*. By the bye, you are indebted your best courtesy to me for this last compliment; as I pay it from my sincere conviction of its truth—a quality rather rare in compliments of these grinning, bowing, scraping times.

Well, I hope writing to *you* will ease a little my troubled

few days, as real chief mourner, I followed his remains to the land of forgetfulness.

JOHN MURDOCH.

—*Cromek.*

soul. Sorely has it been bruised to-day! A *ci-devant* friend of mine, and an intimate acquaintance of yours, has given my feelings a wound that I perceive will gangrene dangerously ere it cure. He has wounded my pride!

R. B.

No. CLXXXVII.

TO MR CUNNINGHAM.

ELLISLAND, *8th August*, 1790.

FORGIVE me, my once dear, and ever dear friend, my seeming negligence. You cannot sit down and fancy the busy life I lead.

I laid down my goose feather to beat my brains for an apt simile, and had some thoughts of a country grannum at a family christening; a bride on the market-day before her marriage; or a tavern-keeper at an election dinner; but the resemblance that hits my fancy best is, that blackguard miscreant, Satan, who roams about like a roaring lion, seeking, *searching* whom he may devour. However, tossed about as I am, if I choose (and who would not choose) to bind down with the crampets of attention the brazen foundation of integrity, I may rear up the superstructure of Independence, and from its daring turrets bid defiance to the storms of fate. And is not this a "consummation devoutly to be wished?"

> "Thy spirit, Independence, let me share;
> Lord of the lion-heart, and eagle-eye!
> Thy steps I follow with my bosom bare,
> Nor heed the storm that howls along the sky!"

Are not these noble verses? They are the introduction of Smollett's Ode to Independence: if you have not seen the poem, I will send it to you.—How wretched is the man that hangs on by the favours of the great! To shrink from every dignity of man, at the approach of a lordly piece

of self-consequence, who, amid all his tinsel glitter, and stately hauteur, is but a creature formed as thou art—and perhaps not so well formed as thou art—came into the world a puling infant as thou didst, and must go out of it as all men must, a naked corse.

R. B.*

No. CLXXXVIII.

TO CRAUFORD TAIT, ESQ., EDINBURGH.

ELLISLAND, 15*th October*, 1790.

DEAR SIR,

ALLOW me to introduce to your acquaintance the bearer, Mr Wm. Duncan, a friend of mine, whom I have long known and long loved. His father, whose only son he is, has a decent little property in Ayrshire, and has bred the young man to the law, in which department he comes up an adventurer to your good town. I shall give you my friend's character in two words: as to his head, he has talents enough, and more than enough for common life; as to his heart, when nature had kneaded the kindly clay that composes it, she said, "I can no more."

You, my good Sir, were born under kinder stars; but your fraternal sympathy, I well know, can enter into the feelings of the young man, who goes into life with the laudable ambition to *do* something, and to *be* something among his fellow-creatures; but whom the consciousness of friendless obscurity presses to the earth, and wounds to the soul!

Even the fairest of his virtues are against him. That independent spirit, and that ingenuous modesty, qualities in-

* "The preceding letter to Mrs Dunlop explains the feelings under which this was written. The strain of indignant invective goes on some time longer in the style which our bard was too apt to indulge, and of which the reader has already seen so much."—*Currie.*

separable from a noble mind, are, with the million, circumstances not a little disqualifying. What pleasure is in the power of the fortunate and the happy, by their notice and patronage, to brighten the countenance and glad the heart of such depressed youth! I am not so angry with mankind for their deaf economy of the purse;—The goods of this world cannot be divided without being lessened—but why be a niggard of that which bestows bliss on a fellow-creature, yet takes nothing from our own means of enjoyment? We wrap ourselves up in the cloak of our own better-fortune, and turn away our eyes, lest the wants and woes of our brother-mortals should disturb the selfish apathy of our souls!

I am the worst hand in the world at asking a favour. That indirect address, that insinuating implication, which, without any positive request, plainly expresses your wish, is a talent not to be acquired at a plough-tail. Tell me then, for you can, in what periphrasis of language, in what circumvolution of phrase, I shall envelope, yet not conceal, this plain story.—"My dear Mr Tait, my friend Mr Duncan, whom I have the pleasure of introducing to you, is a young lad of your own profession, and a gentleman of much modesty, and great worth. Perhaps it may be in your power to assist him in the, to him, important consideration of getting a place; but, at all events, your notice and acquaintance will be a very great acquisition to him; and I dare pledge myself that he will never disgrace your favour."

You may possibly be surprised, Sir, at such a letter from me; 'tis, I own, in the usual way of calculating these matters, more than our acquaintance entitles me to; but my answer is short: Of all the men at your time of life, whom I knew in Edinburgh, you are the most accessible on the side on which I have assailed you. You are very much altered indeed from what you were when I knew you, if generosity point the path you will not tread, or humanity call to you in vain.

As to myself, a being to whose interest I believe you are

still a well-wisher; I am here, breathing at all times, thinking sometimes, and rhyming now and then. Every situation has its share of the cares and pains of life, and my situation I am persuaded has a full ordinary allowance of its pleasures and enjoyments.

My best compliments to your father and Miss Tait. If you have an opportunity, please remember me in the solemn league and covenant of friendship to Mrs Lewis Hay. I am a wretch for not writing her; but I am so hackneyed with self-accusation in that way, that my conscience lies in my bosom with scarce the sensibility of an oyster in its shell. Where is Lady M'Kenzie? wherever she is, God bless her! I likewise beg leave to trouble you with compliments to Mr Wm. Hamilton; Mrs Hamilton and family; and Mrs Chalmers, when you are in that country. Should you meet with Miss Nimmo, please remember me kindly to her.

R. B.

No. CLXXXIX.

TO ———

ELLISLAND, 1790.

DEAR SIR,

WHETHER in the way of my trade, I can be of any service to the Rev. Doctor,* is I fear very doubtful. Ajax's shield consisted, I think, of seven bull hides and a plate of brass, which altogether set Hector's utmost force at defiance. Alas! I am not a Hector, and the worthy Doctor's foes are as securely armed as Ajax was. Ignorance, superstition, bigotry, stupidity, malevolence, self-conceit, envy — all strongly bound in a massy frame of brazen impudence. Good God, Sir! to such a shield, humour is the peck of a

* Dr M'Gill, of Ayr.

sparrow, and satire the pop-gun of a school-boy. Creation-disgracing scelerats such as they, God only can mend, and the devil only can punish. In the comprehending way of Caligula, I wish they all had but one neck. I feel impotent as a child to the ardour of my wishes! O for a withering curse to blast the germins of their wicked machinations. O for a poisonous tornado, winged from the torrid zone of Tartarus, to sweep the spreading crop of their villanous contrivances to the lowest hell! R. B.

No. CXC.

TO MRS DUNLOP.

ELLISLAND, *November*, 1790.

"As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country."

Fate has long owed me a letter of good news from you, in return for the many tidings of sorrow which I have received. In this instance I most cordially obey the apostle —"Rejoice with them that do rejoice"—for me, *to sing* for joy, is no new thing; but *to preach* for joy, as I have done in the commencement of this epistle, is a pitch of extravagant rapture to which I never rose before.

I read your letter—I literally jumped for joy.—How could such a mercurial creature as a poet lumpishly keep his seat on the receipt of the best news from his best friend. I seized my gilt-headed Wangee rod, an instrument indispensably necessary in my left hand, in the moment of inspiration and rapture; and stride, stride — quick and quicker—out skipt I among the broomy banks of Nith to muse over my joy by retail. To keep within the bounds of prose was impossible. Mrs Little's is a more elegant, but not a more sincere compliment to the sweet little fellow, than I, extempore almost, poured out to him in the following verses.

"Sweet flow'ret, pledge o' meikle love,
And ward o' mony a prayer,
What heart o' stane wad thou na move,
Sae helpless, sweet, an' fair!
November hirples o'er the lea
Chill on thy lovely form;
But gane, alas! the shelt'ring tree
Should shield thee frae the storm."

(*Vide vol.* I. p. 221.)

I am much flattered by your approbation of my *Tam o' Shanter*, which you express in your former letter; though by the bye, you load me in that said letter with accusations heavy and many; to all which I plead, *not guilty!* Your book is, I hear, on the road to reach me. As to printing of poetry, when you prepare it for the press, you have only to spell it right, and place the capital letters properly: as to the punctuation, the printers do that themselves.

I have a copy of *Tam o' Shanter* ready to send you by the first opportunity: it is too heavy to send by post.

I heard of Mr Corbet lately. He, in consequence of your recommendation, is most zealous to serve me. Please favour me soon with an account of your good folks; if Mrs H. is recovering, and the young gentleman doing well.

R. B

No. CXCI.

TO LADY W. M. CONSTABLE.

ELLISLAND, 11*th January*, 1791.

MY LADY,

NOTHING less than the unlucky accident of having lately broken my right arm, could have prevented me the moment I received your ladyship's elegant present by Mrs Miller, from returning you my warmest and most grateful acknowledgments. I assure your ladyship, I shall set it apart: the symbols of religion shall only be more sacred. In the moment of poetic composition, the box shall be my inspiring genius. When I would breathe the comprehensive wish

of benevolence for the happiness of others, I shall recollect your ladyship; when I would interest my fancy in the distresses incident to humanity, I shall remember the unfortunate Mary. R. B.*

No. CXCII.

TO WILLIAM DUNBAR, W. S.

ELLISLAND, 17*th January*, 1791.

I AM not gone to Elysium, most noble Colonel,† but am still here in this sublunary world, serving my God by propagating his image, and honouring my king by begetting him loyal subjects.

Many happy returns of the season await my friend. May the thorns of care never beset his path! May peace be an inmate of his bosom, and rapture a frequent visitor of his soul! May the blood-hounds of misfortune never tract his steps, nor the screech-owl of sorrow alarm his dwelling! May enjoyment tell thy hours, and pleasure number thy days, thou friend of the Bard! "Blessed be he that blesseth thee, and cursed be he that curseth thee!!!"

As a farther proof that I am still in the land of existence, I send you a poem, the latest I have composed. I have a particular reason for wishing you only to show it to select friends, should you think it worthy a friend's perusal: but if at your first leisure hour you will favour me with your opinion of, and strictures on the performance, it will be an additional obligation on,

Dear Sir,

Your deeply indebted humble servant, R. B.

* This letter was written acknowledging a present of a valuable snuff-box, with a fine picture of Mary Queen of Scots on the lid. This was the gift of Lady Winifred Maxwell Constable, of the noble family of Nithsdale.—M.

† Mr Dunbar had been a Colonel of the Volunteers.

No. CXCIII.

TO MR PETER HILL.

ELLISLAND, 17*th January*, 1791.

TAKE these two guineas, and place them over against that damned account of yours! which has gagged my mouth these five or six months! I can as little write good things as apologies to the man I owe money to. O the supreme curse of making three guineas do the business of five! Not all the labours of Hercules; not all the Hebrews' three centuries of Egyptian bondage, were such an insuperable business, such an infernal task!! Poverty! thou half-sister of death, thou cousin-german of hell! where shall I find force of execration equal to the amplitude of thy demerits? Oppressed by thee, the venerable ancient, grown hoary in the practice of every virtue, laden with years and wretchedness, implores a little—little aid to support his existence, from a stony-hearted son of Mammon, whose sun of prosperity never knew a cloud; and is by him denied and insulted. Oppressed by thee, the man of sentiment, whose heart glows with independence, and melts with sensibility, inly pines under the neglect, or writhes in bitterness of soul, under the contumely of arrogant, unfeeling wealth. Oppressed by thee, the son of genius, whose ill-starred ambition plants him at the tables of the fashionable and polite, must see in suffering silence, his remark neglected, and his person despised, while shallow greatness, in his idiot attempts at wit, shall meet with countenance and applause. Nor is it only the family of worth that have reason to complain of thee: the children of folly and vice, though in common with thee the offspring of evil, smart equally under thy rod. Owing to thee, the man of unfortunate disposition and neglected education, is condemned as a fool for his dissipation, despised and shunned as a needy wretch, when his follies as usual bring him to want; and when his un-

principled necessities drive him to dishonest practices, he is abhorred as a miscreant, and perishes by the justice of his country. But far otherwise is the lot of the man of family and fortune. *His* early follies and extravagance, are spirit and fire; *his* consequent wants, are the embarrassments of an honest fellow; and when, to remedy the matter, he has gained a legal commission to plunder distant provinces, or massacre peaceful nations, he returns, perhaps, laden with the spoils of rapine and murder; lives wicked and respected, and dies a scoundrel and a lord.—Nay, worst of all, alas for helpless women! the needy prostitute, who has shivered at the corner of the street, waiting to earn the wages of casual prostitution, is left neglected and insulted, ridden down by the chariot wheels of the coroneted RIP, hurrying on to the guilty assignation; she who without the same necessities to plead, riots nightly in the same guilty trade.

Well! divines may say of it what they please; but execration is to the mind, what phlebotomy is to the body: the vital sluices of both are wonderfully relieved by their respective evacuations.

R. B.

No. CXCIV.

TO MR CUNNINGHAM.

ELLISLAND, 23*d January*, 1791.

MANY happy returns of the season to you, my dear friend! As many of the good things of this life, as is consistent with the usual mixture of good and evil in the cup of Being!

I have just finished a poem (Tam o' Shanter) which you will receive inclosed. It is my first essay in the way of tales.

I have these several months been hammering at an elegy on the amiable and accomplished Miss Burnet. I have got,

and can get, no farther than the following fragment, on which please give me your strictures. In all kinds of poetic composition, I set great store by your opinion; but in sentimental verses, in the poetry of the heart, no Roman Catholic ever set more value on the infallibility of the Holy Father than I do on yours.

I mean the introductory couplets as text verses.

ELEGY

On the late Miss BURNET *of* MONBODDO.

"Life ne'er exulted in so rich a prize,
As Burnet lovely from her native skies;
Nor envious death so triumph'd in a blow,
As that which laid th' accomplish'd Burnet low."

[*Vide vol.* ii. *page* 13.]

Let me hear from you soon. Adieu! R. B.

No. CXCV.

TO DR MOORE.

ELLISLAND, 28*th January*, 1791.

I DO not know, Sir, whether you are a subscriber to Grose's Antiquities of Scotland. If you are, the inclosed poem will not be altogether new to you. Captain Grose did me the favour to send me a dozen copies of the proof sheet, of which this is one. Should you have read the piece before, still this will answer the principal end I have in view: it will give me another opportunity of thanking you for all your goodness to the rustic bard; and also of showing you, that the abilities you have been pleased to commend and patronise are still employed in the way you wish.

The *Elegy on Captain Henderson*, is a tribute to the memory of a man I loved much. Poets have in this the same advantage as Roman Catholics; they can be of service to their friends after they have past that bourne where

all other kindness ceases to be of avail. Whether, after all, either the one or the other be of any real service to the dead, is, I fear, very problematical; but I am sure they are highly gratifying to the living: and as a very orthodox text, I forget where in scripture, says, "whatsoever is not of faith is sin;" so say I, whatsoever is not detrimental to society, and is of positive enjoyment, is of God, the giver of all good things, and ought to be received and enjoyed by his creatures with thankful delight. As almost all my religious tenets originate from my heart, I am wonderfully pleased with the idea, that I can still keep up a tender intercourse with the dearly beloved friend, or still more dearly beloved mistress, who is gone to the world of spirits.

The ballad on Queen Mary was begun while I was busy with Percy's Reliques of English Poetry. By the way, how much is every honest heart, which has a tincture of Caledonian prejudice, obliged to you for your glorious story of Buchanan and Targe! 'Twas an unequivocal proof of your loyal gallantry of soul, giving Targe the victory. I should have been mortified to the ground if you had not.

I have just read over, once more of many times, your Zeluco. I marked with my pencil, as I went along, every passage that pleased me particularly above the rest; and one or two, I think, which, with humble deference, I am disposed to think unequal to the merits of the book. I have sometimes thought to transcribe these marked passages, or at least so much of them as to point where they are, and send them to you. Original strokes that strongly depict the human heart, is your and Fielding's province, beyond any other novelist I have ever perused. Richardson indeed might, perhaps, be excepted; but unhappily, his *dramatis personæ* are beings of another world; and however they may captivate the unexperienced, romantic fancy of a boy or a girl, they will ever, in proportion as we have made human nature our study, dissatisfy our riper years.

As to my private concerns, I am going on, a mighty taxgather before the Lord, and have lately had the interest to

get myself ranked on the list of excise as a supervisor. I am not yet employed as such, but in a few years I shall fall into the file of supervisorship by seniority. I have had an immense loss in the death of the Earl of Glencairn; the patron from whom all my fame and fortune took its rise. Independent of my grateful attachment to him, which was indeed so strong that it pervaded my very soul, and was entwined with the thread of my existence: so soon as the prince's friends had got in, (and every dog you know has his day,) my getting forward in the excise would have been an easier business than otherwise it will be. Though this was a consummation devoutly to be wished, yet, thank Heaven, I can live and rhyme as I am; and as to my boys, poor little fellows! if I cannot place them on as high an elevation in life as I could wish, I shall, if I am favoured so much of the Disposer of events as to see that period, fix them on as broad and independent a basis as possible. Among the many wise adages which have been treasured up by our Scottish ancestors, this is one of the best, *Better be the head o' the commonalty, than the tail o' the gentry.*

But I am got on a subject which, however interesting to me, is of no manner of consequence to you; so I shall give you a short poem on the other page, and close this with assuring you how sincerely I have the honour to be, Yours, &c. R. B.

Written on the blank leaf of a book, which I presented to a very young lady, whom I had formerly characterised under the denomination of *The Rose Bud.*

No. CXCVI.

TO A. F. TYTLER, ESQ.

ELLISLAND, *February*, 1791.

SIR,

NOTHING less than the unfortunate accident I have met with could have prevented my grateful acknowledgments

for your letter. His own favourite poem, and that an essay in the walk of the muses entirely new to him, where consequently his hopes and fears were on the most anxious alarm for his success in the attempt; to have that poem so much applauded by one of the first judges, was the most delicious vibration that ever thrilled along the heart-strings of a poor poet. However, Providence, to keep up the proper proportion of evil with the good, which it seems is necessary in this sublunary state, thought proper to check my exultation by a very serious misfortune. A day or two after I received your letter, my horse came down with me and broke my right arm. As this is the first service my arm has done me since its disaster, I find myself unable to do more than just in general terms thank you for this additional instance of your patronage and friendship. As to the faults you detected in the piece, they are truly there: one of them, the hit at the lawyer and priest, I shall cut out; as to the falling off in the catastrophe, for the reason you justly adduce it cannot easily be remedied. Your approbation, Sir, has given me such additional spirits to persevere in this species of poetic composition, that I am already revolving two or three stories in my fancy. If I can bring these floating ideas to bear any kind of embodied form, it will give me an additional opportunity of assuring you how much I have the honour to be, &c.

R. B.*

* The late Lord Woodhouselee, the gentleman to whom Burns addressed the foregoing letter, fully appreciated the extraordinary merits of 'Tam o' Shanter, as the following criticism from his pen will sufficiently evidence:—

"EDINBURGH, 12*th March*, 1791.

"DEAR SIR,—Mr Hill yesterday put into my hands a sheet of 'Grose's Antiquities,' containing a poem of yours, entitled, 'Tam o' Shanter,' a tale. The very high pleasure I have received from the perusal of this admirable piece, I feel, demands the warmest acknowledgments. Hill tells me he is to send off a packet for you this day; I cannot resist, therefore, putting on paper what I must have told you in person, had I met with you after the recent

No. CXCVII.

TO MRS DUNLOP.

ELLISLAND, *7th Feb.* 1791.

WHEN I tell you, Madam, that by a fall, not from my horse, but with my horse, I have been a cripple some time, and that this is the first day my arm and hand have been able to serve me in writing; you will allow that it is too good

perusal of your tale, which is, that I feel I owe you a debt, which, if undischarged, would reproach me with ingratitude. I have seldom in my life tasted of higher enjoyment from any work of genius, than I have received from this composition; and I am much mistaken, if this poem alone, had you never written another syllable, would not have been sufficient to have transmitted your name down to posterity with high reputation. In the introductory part, where you paint the character of your hero, and exhibit him at the alehouse *ingle*, with his tippling cronies, you have delineated nature with a humour and *naïveté*, that would do honour to Matthew Prior; but when you describe the infernal orgies of the witches' sabbath, and the hellish scenery in which they are exhibited, you display a power of imagination that Shakspeare himself could not have exceeded. I know not that I have ever met with a picture of more horrible fancy than the following:

> 'Coffins stood round like open presses,
> That shaw'd the dead in their last dresses;
> And by some devilish cantrip slight,
> Each in his cauld hand held a light.'

But when I came to the succeeding lines, my blood ran cold within me:

> 'A knife, a father's throat had mangled,
> Whom his ain son of life bereft;
> *The grey hairs yet stack to the heft.*'

"And here, after the two following lines, 'Wi' mair o' horrible and awfu',' &c. the descriptive part might perhaps have been better closed, than the four lines which succeed, which, though good in themselves, yet as they derive all their merit from the satire they contain, are here rather misplaced among the circumstances of pure horror. The initiation of the young witch is most happily described—the effect of her charms exhibited in the dance of Satan himself—the apostrophe—'Ah, little thought thy

an apology for my seemingly ungrateful silence. I am now getting better, and am able to rhyme a little, which implies some tolerable ease; as I cannot think that the most poetic genius is able to compose on the rack.

I do not remember if ever I mentioned to you my having an idea of composing an elegy on the late Miss Burnet of Monboddo. I had the honour of being pretty well acquainted with her, and have seldom felt so much at the loss of an acquaintance, as when I heard that so amiable and accomplished a piece of God's work was no more. I have, as yet, gone no farther than the following fragment, of which please let me have your opinion. You know that elegy is a subject so much exhausted, that any new idea on the business is not to be expected: 'tis well if we can place an old idea in a new light. How far I have succeeded as to this last, you will judge from what follows.

[*See the Elegy, page* 13, *vol.* ii.]

I have proceeded no further.

reverend graunie!'—the transport of Tam, who forgets his situation, and enters completely into the spirit of the scene, are all features of high merit in this excellent composition. The only fault it possesses, is, that the winding up, or conclusion of the story, is not commensurate to the interest which is excited by the descriptive and characteristic painting of the preceding parts.—The preparation is fine, but the result is not adequate. But for this, perhaps you have a good apology—you stick to the popular tale.*

"And now that I have got out my mind, and feel a little relieved of the weight of that debt I owed you, let me end this desultory scroll by an advice: you have proved your talent for a species of composition in which but a very few of our own poets have succeeded. Go on—write more tales in the same style—you will eclipse Prior and La Fontaine; for, with equal wit, equal power of numbers, and equal *naïveté* of expression, you have a bolder, and more vigorous imagination."

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* These remarks of Lord Woodhouselee's are very much to the purpose—they are excellent, and our Bard profited so far by them, as to leave out the four horrible lines about the priests' hearts.—H.

Your kind letter, with your kind *remembrance* of your godson, came safe. This last, Madam, is scarcely what my pride can bear. As to the little fellow, he is, partiality apart, the finest boy I have of a long time seen. He is now seventeen months old, has the small-pox and measles over, has cut several teeth, and never had a grain of doctor's drugs in his bowels.

I am truly happy to hear that the "little floweret" is blooming so fresh and fair, and that the "mother-plant" is rather recovering her drooping head. Soon and well may her "cruel wounds" be healed! I have written thus far with a good deal of difficulty. When I get a little abler you shall hear farther from,

Madam, yours,

R. B.

No. CXCVIII.

TO THE REV. ARCH. ALISON.

ELLISLAND, *near Dumfries*, 14*th Feb.* 1791.

SIR,

YOU must by this time have set me down as one of the most ungrateful of men. You did me the honour to present me with a book, which does honour to science and the intellectual powers of man, and I have not even so much as acknowledged the receipt of it. The fact is, you yourself are to blame for it. Flattered as I was by your telling me that you wished to have my opinion of the work, the old spiritual enemy of mankind, who knows well that vanity is one of the sins that most easily beset me, put it into my head to ponder over the performance with the look-out of a critic, and to draw up forsooth a deep learned digest of strictures on a composition, of which, in fact, until I read the book, I did not even know the first principles. I own, Sir, that at first glance, several of your propositions startled

me as paradoxical. That the martial clangor of a trumpet had something in it vastly more grand, heroic, and sublime, than the twingle twangle of a Jews-harp: that the delicate flexure of a rose-twig, when the half-blown flower is heavy with the tears of the dawn, was infinitely more beautiful and elegant than the upright stub of a burdock; and that from something innate and independent of all associations of ideas;—these I had set down as irrefragable, orthodox truths, until perusing your book shook my faith.—In short, Sir, except Euclid's Elements of Geometry, which I made a shift to unravel by my father's fire-side, in the winter evening of the first season I held the plough, I never read a book which gave me such a quantum of information, and added so much to my stock of ideas, as your "Essays on the Principles of Taste." One thing, Sir, you must forgive my mentioning as an uncommon merit in the work, I mean the language. To clothe abstract philosophy in elegance of style, sounds something like a contradiction in terms; but you have convinced me that they are quite compatible.

I inclose you some poetic bagatelles of my late composition. The one in print is my first essay in the way of telling a tale.

I am, Sir, &c. R. B.

No. CXCIX.

TO THE REV. G. BAIRD.

ELLISLAND, 1791.

REVEREND SIR,

WHY did you, my dear Sir, write to me in such a hesitating style on the business of poor Bruce? Don't I know, and have I not felt, the many ills, the peculiar ills that poetic flesh is heir to? You shall have your choice of all the unpublished poems I have; and had your letter had my direction so as to have reached me sooner, (it only came

to my hand this moment,) I should have directly put you out of suspense on the subject. I only ask, that some prefatory advertisement in the book, as well as the subscription bills, may bear, that the publication is solely for the benefit of Bruce's mother. I would not put it in the power of ignorance to surmise, or malice to insinuate, that I clubbed a share in the work from mercenary motives. Nor need you give me credit for any remarkable generosity in my part of the business. I have such a host of peccadilloes, failings, follies, and backslidings, (any body but myself might perhaps give some of them a worse appellation,) that by way of some balance, however trifling, in the account, I am fain to do any good that occurs in my very limited power to a fellow-creature, just for the selfish purpose of clearing a little the vista of retrospection.

R. B.*

* This letter is without date, but from the subjoined one, to which it is an answer, it was probably written about this period.

"LONDON, 8th *February*, 1791.

"SIR,—I trouble you with this letter to inform you that I am in hopes of being able very soon to bring to the press a new edition (long since talked of) of Michael Bruce's Poems. The profits of the edition are to go to his mother—a woman of eighty years of age—poor and helpless. The poems are to be published by subscription: and it may be possible, I think, to make out a 2s. 6d. or 3s. volume, with the assistance of a few hitherto unpublished verses, which I have got from the mother of the poet.

"But the design I have in view in writing to you, is not merely to inform you of these facts, it is to solicit the aid of your name and pen in support of the scheme. The reputation of Bruce is already high with every reader of classical taste, and I shall be anxious to guard against tarnishing his character, by allowing any new poems to appear that may lower it. For this purpose, the MSS. I am in possession of, have been submitted to the revision of some whose critical talents I can trust to, and I mean still to submit them to others.

"May I beg to know, therefore, if you will take the trouble of perusing the MSS.—of giving your opinion, and suggesting what curtailments, alterations, or amendments, occur to you as advisable?—And will you allow us to let it be known, that a few lines by you will be added to the volume?

"I know the extent of this request. It is bold to make it.

No. CC.

TO MR CUNNINGHAM.

ELLISLAND, 12*th March*, 1791.

IF the foregoing piece be worth your strictures, let me have them. For my own part, a thing that I have just composed, always appears through a double portion of that partial medium in which an author will ever view his own works. I believe, in general, novelty has something in it that inebriates the fancy, and not unfrequently dissipates and fumes away like other intoxication, and leaves the poor patient, as usual, with an aching heart. A striking instance of this might be adduced, in the revolution of many a hymeneal honeymoon. But lest I sink into stupid prose, and so sacrilegiously intrude on the office of my parish priest, I shall fill up the page in my own way, and give you another

But I have this consolation, that though you see it proper to refuse it, you will not blame me for having made it; you will see my apology in the *motive*.

"May I just add, that Michael Bruce is one in whose company, from his past appearance, you would not, I am convinced, blush to be found; and as I would submit every line of his that should now be published, to your own criticisms, you would be assured that nothing derogatory either to him or you, would be admitted in that appearance he may make in future.

"You have already paid an honourable tribute to kindred genius, in Fergusson—I fondly hope that the mother of Bruce will experience your patronage.

"I wish to have the subscription papers circulated by the 14th of March, Bruce's birth-day; which I understand some friends in Scotland talk this year of observing—at that time it will be resolved, I imagine, to place a plain, humble stone over his grave. This, at least, I trust you will agree to do—to furnish, in a few couplets, an *inscription* for it.

"On these points may I solicit an answer as early as possible; a short delay might disappoint us in procuring that relief to the mother, which is the object of the whole.

"You will be pleased to address for me under cover to the Duke of Athole, London."—G. B.

song of my late composition, which will appear perhaps in Johnson's work, as well as the former.

You must know a beautiful Jacobite air, *There'll never be peace 'till Jamie comes hame.* When political combustion ceases to be the object of princes and patriots, it then, you know, becomes the lawful prey of historians and poets.

"By yon castle wa' at the close of the day,
I heard a man sing, tho' his head it was grey;
And as he was singing, the tears fast down came—
There'll never be peace till Jamie comes hame."*
[*See vol.* ii. *page* 315.]

If you like the air, and if the stanzas hit your fancy, you cannot imagine, my dear friend, how much you would oblige me, if, by the charms of your delightful voice, you would give my honest effusion to "the memory of joys that are past," to the few friends whom you indulge in that pleasure. But I have scribbled on till I hear the clock has intimated the near approach of

"That hour, o' night's black arch the key-stane."—

So good night to you! Sound be your sleep, and delectable your dreams! Apropos, how do you like this thought in a ballad I have just now on the tapis?

"I look to the west when I gae to rest,
That happy my dreams and my slumbers may be;
Far, far in the west is he I lo'e best,
The lad that is dear to my babie and me!"

Good night once more, and God bless you!

R. B.

* This beautiful little Jacobite ditty having appeared in Johnson's Museum with the old song mark at it, it has been received as an old song all over Scotland. There *was* an old song, but I do not know where to find it. I remember only two lines:

My heart it is sair, and will soon brik in twa;
For there's few good fellows sin' Jamie's awa.

This last line is the name of the air in the very old collections of Scottish tunes.—H.

No. CCI.

TO MR ALEXANDER DALZEL,*

FACTOR, FINDLAYSTON.

ELLISLAND, 19*th March*, 1791.

MY DEAR SIR,

I HAVE taken the liberty to frank this letter to you, as it incloses an idle poem of mine, which I send you; and, God knows, you may perhaps pay dear enough for it if you read it through. Not that this is my own opinion; but the author by the time he has composed and corrected his work, has quite pored away all his powers of critical discrimination.

I can easily guess from my own heart, what you have felt on a late most melancholy event. God knows what I have suffered, at the loss of my best friend, my first and dearest patron and benefactor; the man to whom I owe all that I am and have! I am gone into mourning for him, and with more sincerity of grief than I fear some will, who by nature's ties ought to feel on the occasion.

I will be exceedingly obliged to you indeed, to let me know the news of the noble family, how the poor mother

* This gentleman, the factor, or steward, of Burns' noble friend, Lord Glencairn, with a view to encourage a second edition of the poems, laid the volume before his lordship, with such an account of the rustic bard's situation and prospects as from his slender acquaintance with him he could furnish. The result, as communicated to Burns by Mr Dalzel, is highly creditable to the character of Lord Glencairn. After reading the book, his lordship declared that its merits greatly exceeded his expectation, and he took it with him as a *literary curiosity* to Edinburgh. He repeated his wishes to be of service to Burns, and desired Mr Dalzel to inform him, that in patronizing the book, ushering it with effect into the world, or treating with the booksellers, he would most willingly give every aid in his power; adding his request, that Burns would take the earliest opportunity of letting him know in what way or manner he could best further his interests.—*Cromek.*

and the two sisters support their loss. I had a packet of poetic bagatelles ready to send to Lady Betty, when I saw the fatal tidings in the newspaper. I see by the same channel that the honoured REMAINS of my noble patron, are designed to be brought to the family burial place. Dare I trouble you to let me know privately before the day of interment, that I may cross the country, and steal among the crowd, to pay a tear to the last sight of my ever revered benefactor? It will oblige me beyond expression.

R. B.

No. CCII.

TO MRS GRAHAM, OF FINTRY.

ELLISLAND, 1791.

MADAM,

WHETHER it is that the story of our Mary Queen of Scots has a peculiar effect on the feelings of a poet, or whether I have in the inclosed ballad succeeded beyond my usual poetic success, I know not; but it has pleased me beyond any effort of my muse for a good while past; on that account I inclose it particularly to you. It is true, the purity of my motives may be suspected. I am already deeply indebted to Mr Graham's goodness; and what, *in the usual ways of men*, is of infinitely greater importance, Mr G. can do me service of the utmost importance in time to come. I was born a poor dog; and however I may occasionally pick a better bone than I used to do, I know I must live and die poor: but I will indulge the flattering faith that my poetry will considerably outlive my poverty; and without any fustian affectation of spirit, I can promise and affirm, that it must be no ordinary craving of the latter shall ever make me do any thing injurious to the honest fame of the former. Whatever may be my failings—for failings are a part of human nature—may they ever be those of

a generous heart, and an independent mind! It is no fault of mine that I was born to dependence; nor is it Mr Graham's chiefest praise that he can command influence; but it is his merit to bestow, not only with the kindness of a brother, but with the politeness of a gentleman; and I trust it shall be mine to receive with thankfulness, and remember with undiminished gratitude.

R. B.

No. CCIII.

TO MRS DUNLOP.

ELLISLAND, 11*th April*, 1791.

I AM once more able, my honoured friend, to return you, with my own hand, thanks for the many instances of your friendship, and particularly for your kind anxiety in this last disaster that my evil genius had in store for me. However, life is chequered—joy and sorrow—for on Saturday morning last, Mrs Burns made me a present of a fine boy; rather stouter, but not so handsome as your godson was at his time of life. Indeed I look on your little namesake to be my *chef d'œuvre* in that species of manufacture, as I look on Tam o' Shanter to be my standard performance in the poetical line. 'Tis true, both the one and the other discover a spice of roguish waggery, that might perhaps be as well spared; but then they also show, in my opinion, a force of genius, and a finishing polish, that I despair of ever excelling. Mrs Burns is getting stout again, and laid as lustily about her to-day at breakfast, as a reaper from the corn-ridge. That is the peculiar privilege and blessing of our hale, sprightly damsels, that are bred among the *hay and heather*. We cannot hope for that highly polished mind, that charming delicacy of soul, which is found among the female world in the more elevated stations of life, and which is certainly by far the most bewitching charm in the

famous cestus of Venus. It is indeed such an inestimable treasure, that where it can be had in its native heavenly purity, unstained by some one or other of the many shades of affectation, and unalloyed by some one or other of the many species of caprice, I declare to Heaven, I should think it cheaply purchased at the expense of every other earthly good! But as this angelic creature is, I am afraid, extremely rare in any station and rank of life, and totally denied to such an humble one as mine, we meaner mortals must put up with the next rank of female excellence—as fine a figure and face we can produce as any rank of life whatever; rustic, native grace; unaffected modesty and unsullied purity; nature's mother-wit, and the rudiments of taste; a simplicity of soul, unsuspicious of, because unacquainted with, the crooked ways of a selfish, interested, disingenuous world; and the dearest charm of all the rest, a yielding sweetness of disposition, and a generous warmth of heart, grateful for love on our part, and ardently glowing with a more than equal return; these, with a healthy frame, a sound, vigorous constitution, which your higher ranks can scarcely ever hope to enjoy, are the charms of lovely woman in my humble walk of life.

This is the greatest effort my broken arm has yet made. Do let me hear, by first post, how *cher petit Monsieur* comes on with his small-pox. May Almighty goodness preserve and restore him!

R. B.

No. CCIV.

TO ———.

ELLISLAND, 1791.

DEAR SIR,

I AM exceedingly to blame in not writing you long ago; but the truth is, that I am the most indolent of all human

beings, and when I matriculate in the herald's office, I intend that my supporters shall be two sloths, my crest a slow-worm, and the motto, "Deil tak' the foremost." So much by way of apology for not thanking you sooner for your kind execution of my commission.

I would have sent you the poem; but somehow or other it found its way into the public papers, where you must have seen it.

I am ever, dear Sir, yours sincerely,

R. B.

No. CCV.

TO ——.

ELLISLAND, 1791.

THOU eunuch of language: thou Englishman, who never was south the Tweed: thou servile echo of fashionable barbarisms: thou quack, vending the nostrums of empirical elocution: thou marriage-maker between vowels and consonants, on the Gretna-green of caprice: thou cobbler, botching the flimsy socks of bombast oratory: thou blacksmith, hammering the rivets of absurdity: thou butcher, embruing thy hands in the bowels of orthography: thou arch-heretic in pronunciation: thou pitch-pipe of affected emphasis: thou carpenter, mortising the awkward joints of jarring sentences: thou squeaking dissonance of cadence: thou pimp of gender: thou Lyon Herald to silly etymology: thou antipode of grammar: thou executioner of construction: thou brood of the speech-distracting builders of the Tower of Babel: thou lingual confusion worse confounded: thou scape-gallows from the land of syntax: thou scavenger of mood and tense: thou murderous accoucheur of infant learning: thou *ignus fatuus*, misleading the steps of benighted ignorance: thou pickle-herring in the puppet-show of nonsense: thou faithful recorder of barbarous idiom:

thou persecutor of syllabication: thou baleful meteor, foretelling and facilitating the rapid approach of Nox and Erebus.

R. B.*

No. CCVI.

TO MR CUNNINGHAM.

11*th June*, 1791.

LET me interest you, my dear Cunningham, in behalf of the gentleman who waits on you with this. He is a Mr Clarke, of Moffat, principal schoolmaster there, and is at present suffering severely under the persecution of one or two powerful individuals of his employers. He is accused of harshness to boys that were placed under his care. God help the teacher, if a man of sensibility and genius, and such is my friend Clarke, when a booby father presents him with his booby son, and insists on lighting up the rays of science, in a fellow's head whose skull is impervious and inaccessible by any other way than a positive fracture with a cudgel: a fellow whom in fact it savours of impiety to at-

* "This singular letter," says Mr Cunningham, "was, it is believed, sent to a critic who had taken the poet to task about obscure language and imperfect grammar: he delighted in this sort of scolding, and employed it sometimes very happily in conversation to repel petulance, and confound those

'Word-catchers who live on syllables,'

that infested society then as they do now. The language which Burns used in his poetry was new to many: no one had dared to use the mother-tongue with such boldness before, and it has even been surmised by one of his editors that he created words whenever he wanted them. Those who are intimately acquainted with the language of Scotland will acquit Burns of the charge: the words instanced against him, 'cootie' and 'heugh,' are right old Scottish, and current in Ayrshire, Galloway, and the county of Dumfries."—To the above list Mr Cunningham might have added both Lanarkshire and Renfrewshire.—M.

tempt making a scholar of, as he has been marked a block-head in the book of fate, at the Almighty fiat of his Creator.

The patrons of Moffat-school are, the ministers, magistrates, and town-council of Edinburgh, and as the business comes now before them, let me beg my dearest friend to do every thing in his power to serve the interests of a man of genius and worth, and a man whom I particularly respect and esteem. You know some good fellows among the magistracy and council, but particularly you have much to say with a reverend gentleman to whom you have the honour of being very nearly related, and whom this country and age have had the honour to produce. I need not name the historian of Charles V. I tell him through the medium of his nephew's influence, that Mr Clarke is a gentleman who will not disgrace even his patronage. I know the merits of the cause thoroughly, and say it, that my friend is falling a sacrifice to prejudiced ignorance.

God help the children of dependence! Hated and persecuted by their enemies, and too often, alas! almost unexceptionably, received by their friends with disrespect and reproach, under the thin disguise of cold civility and humiliating advice. O! to be a sturdy savage, stalking in the pride of his independence, amid the solitary wilds of his deserts, rather than in civilized life, helplessly to tremble for a subsistence, precarious as the caprice of a fellow-creature! Every man has his virtues, and no man is without his failings; and curse on that privileged plain-dealing of friendship, which, in the hour of my calamity, cannot reach forth the helping hand without at the same time pointing out those failings, and apportioning them their share in procuring my present distress. My friends, for such the world calls ye, and such ye think yourselves to be, pass by my virtues if you please, but do, also, spare my follies: the first will witness in my breast for themselves, and the last will give pain enough to the ingenuous mind without you. And since deviating more or less from the paths of propriety and rectitude, must be incident to human nature, do

thou, Fortune, put it in my power, always from myself, and of myself, to bear the consequence of those errors! I do not want to be independent that I may sin, but I want to be independent in my sinning.

To return in this rambling letter to the subject I set out with, let me recommend my friend, Mr Clarke, to your acquaintance and good offices; his worth entitles him to the one, and his gratitude will merit the other. I long much to hear from you. Adieu!

R. B.

No. CCVII.

TO THE EARL OF BUCHAN.

ELLISLAND, 1791.

MY LORD,

LANGUAGE sinks under the ardour of my feelings when I would thank your lordship for the honour you have done me in inviting me to make one at the coronation of the bust of Thomson. In my first enthusiasm in reading the card you did me the honour to write me, I overlooked every obstacle, and determined to go; but I fear it will not be in my power. A week or two's absence, in the very middle of my harvest, is what I much doubt I dare not venture on. I once already made a pilgrimage *up* the whole course of the Tweed, and fondly would I take the same delightful journey *down* the windings of that delightful stream.

Your lordship hints at an ode for the occasion: but who would write after Collins? I read over his verses to the memory of Thomson, and despaired.—I got indeed to the length of three or four stanzas, in the way of address to the shade of the bard, on crowning his bust. I shall trouble your lordship with the subjoined copy of them, which, I am afraid, will be but too convincing a proof how unequal I

am to the task. However, it affords me an opportunity of approaching your lordship, and declaring how sincerely and gratefully I have the honour to be, &c.

R. B

No. CCVIII.

TO MR THOMAS SLOAN.

ELLISLAND, *Sept. 1st*, 1791.

MY DEAR SLOAN,

SUSPENSE is worse than disappointment; for that reason I hurry to tell you that I just now learn that Mr Ballantine does not choose to interfere more in the business. I am truly sorry for it, but cannot help it.

You blame me for not writing you sooner, but you will please to recollect that you omitted one little necessary piece of information;—your address.

However, you know equally well, my hurried life, indolent temper, and strength of attachment. It must be a longer period than the longest life "in the world's hale and undegenerate days," that will make me forget so dear a friend as Mr Sloan. I am prodigal enough at times, but I will not part with such a treasure as that.

I can easily enter into the *embarras* of your present situation. You know my favourite quotation from Young—

> ——"On Reason build RESOLVE!
> That column of true majesty in man."—

And that other favourite one from Thomson's Alfred—

> "What proves the hero truly GREAT,
> Is, never, never to despair."

Or, shall I quote you an author of your acquaintance?

> "——Whether DOING, SUFFERING, or FORBEARING,
> You may do miracles by—PERSEVERING."

I have nothing new to tell you. The few friends we have are going on in the old way. I sold my crop on this

day se'ennight, and sold it very well. A guinea an acre, on an average, above value. But such a scene of drunkenness was hardly ever seen in this country. After the roup was over, about thirty people engaged in a battle, every man for his own hand, and fought it out for three hours. Nor was the scene much better in the house. No fighting, indeed, but folks lying drunk on the floor, and decanting, until both my dogs got so drunk by attending them, that they could not stand. You will easily guess how I enjoyed the scene; as I was no farther over than you used to see me.

Mrs B. and family have been in Aryshire these many weeks.

Farewell! and God bless you, my dear Friend!

R. B.

No. CCIX.

TO COLONEL FULLARTON OF FULLARTON.

ELLISLAND, *October* 3*d*, 1791.

SIR,

I HAVE just this minute got the frank, and next minute must send it to post, else I purposed to have sent you two or three other bagatelles that might have amused a vacant hour, about as well as 'Six excellent new Songs,' or the 'Aberdeen prognostications for the year to come.' I shall probably trouble you soon with another packet, about the gloomy month of November, when the people of England hang and drown themselves—any thing generally is better than one's own thoughts.

Fond as I may be of my own productions, it is not for their sake that I am so anxious to send you them. I am ambitious, covetously ambitious, of being known to a gentleman who was a foreign ambassador as soon as he was a man; and a leader of armies as soon as he was a soldier; and that with an eclat unknown to the usual minions of a

court, men who with all the adventitious advantages of princely connections, and princely fortunes, must yet, like the caterpillar, labour a whole life-time before they reach the wished-for height, there to roost a stupid chrysalis, and doze out the remaining glimmering existence of old age.

If the gentleman that accompanied you when you did me the honour of calling on me, is with you, I beg to be respectfully remembered to him.

I have the honour to be,

Your highly obliged and most devoted humble servant,

R. B.*

* This letter originally appeared in the Paisley Magazine, 1828, accompanied by the following note. "With the following relic from the pen of our Poet, we have been favoured by a friend; and all connected with his name and history possessing a share of interest, it will not, we are confident, require further apology for its insertion. As indeed appears, this casual note was addressed to Colonel Fullarton whilst resident in England, accompanied as would also seem by some verses: what these were, we regret we have been unable to ascertain. It is not perhaps to be expected, that any thing will be discovered tending further to elucidate the character of Burns: indeed, his genius may be said to have been of such an open and uncompromising nature, as irrepressibly to have unfolded in almost every sentence of his inimitable writings. Yet as an additional fragment of that frame of thought so characteristic of its great author, the present letter is certainly worthy of preservation; whilst it seems but justice to give every publicity to an opinion so flattering and so unequivocally expressed towards the object of the writer's admiration. Colonel Fullarton, it is believed, had not been introduced to Burns prior to his return from India about 1784; but having at this period met with him, he continued ever after an enthusiastic and warm friend of his distinguished countryman; and to his imperishable honour, has been commemorated in some of the Poet's finest productions. We shall only farther add, that the original letter remains in the possession of the honourable Mrs Hamilton Fullarton, the Colonel's widow, and till now has never been published."—M.

No. CCX.

TO LADY E. CUNNINGHAM.

My Lady,

I would, as usual, have availed myself of the privilege your goodness has allowed me, of sending you any thing I compose in my poetical way; but as I had resolved, so soon as the shock of my irreparable loss would allow me, to pay a tribute to my late benefactor, I determined to make that the first piece I should do myself the honour of sending you. Had the wing of my fancy been equal to the ardour of my heart, the inclosed had been much more worthy your perusal: as it is, I beg leave to lay it at your ladyship's feet.* As all the world knows my obligations to the late Earl of Glencairn, I would wish to show as openly, that my heart glows, and shall ever glow, with the most grateful sense and remembrance of his lordship's goodness. The sables I did myself the honour to wear to his lordship's memory, were not the "mockery of woe." Nor shall my gratitude perish with me!—If, among my children, I shall have a son that has a heart, he shall hand it down to his child as a family honour, and a family debt, that my dearest existence I owe to the noble house of Glencairn!

I was about to say, my lady, that if you think the poem may venture to see the light, I would, in some way or other, give it to the world.

R. B.

* The poem inclosed was the Lament for James Earl of Glencairn.—M.

No. CCXI.

TO MR AINSLIE.

ELLISLAND, 1791.

MY DEAR AINSLIE,

CAN you minister to a mind diseased? can you, amid the horrors of penitence, regret, remorse, head-ache, nausea, and all the rest of the damned hounds of hell, that beset a poor wretch, who has been guilty of the sin of drunkenness —can you speak peace to a troubled soul?

Miserable perdu that I am, I have tried every thing that used to amuse me, but in vain: here must I sit, a monument of the vengeance laid up in store for the wicked, slowly counting every chick of the clock as it slowly, slowly, numbers over these lazy scoundrels of hours, who, damn them, are ranked up before me, every one at his neighbour's backside, and every one with a burthen of anguish on his back, to pour on my devoted head—and there is none to pity me. My wife scolds me! my business torments me, and my sins come staring me in the face, every one telling a more bitter tale than his fellow.—When I tell you even * * * has lost its power to please, you will guess something of my hell within, and all around me—I began *Elibanks and Elibraes*, but the stanzas fell unenjoyed, and unfinished from my listless tongue: at last I luckily thought of reading over an old letter of yours, that lay by me in my book-case, and I felt something for the first time since I opened my eyes, of pleasurable existence.———Well—I begin to breathe a little, since I began to write to you. How are you, and what are you doing? How goes Law? Apropos, for connexion's sake do not address to me supervisor, for that is an honour I cannot pretend to—I am on the list, as we call it, for a supervisor, and will be called out by and bye to act as one; but at present, I am a simple gauger, tho' t'other day I got an appointment to an excise

division of 25*l. per annum* better than the rest. My present income, down money, is 70*l. per annum*.

I have one or two good fellows here whom you would be glad to know.

R. B.

No. CCXII.

TO MISS DAVIES.

It is impossible, Madam, that the generous warmth and angelic purity of your youthful mind, can have any idea of that moral disease under which I unhappily must rank as the chief of sinners; I mean a torpitude of the moral powers, that may be called, a lethargy of conscience.—In vain Remorse rears her horrent crest, and rouses all her snakes: beneath the deadly-fixed eye and leaden hand of Indolence, their wildest ire is charmed into the torpor of the bat, slumbering out the rigours of winter in the chink of a ruined wall. Nothing less, Madam, could have made me so long neglect your obliging commands. Indeed I had one apology—the bagatelle was not worth presenting. Besides, so strongly am I interested in Miss Davies's fate and welfare in the serious business of life, amid its chances and changes, that to make her the subject of a silly ballad, is downright mockery of these ardent feelings; 'tis like an impertinent jest to a dying friend.

Gracious Heaven! why this disparity between our wishes and our powers? Why is the most generous wish to make others blest, impotent and ineffectual—as the idle breeze that crosses the pathless desert? In my walks of life I have met with a few people to whom how gladly would I have said—"Go, be happy! I know that your hearts have been wounded by the scorn of the proud, whom accident has placed above you—or worse still, in whose hands are, perhaps, placed many of the comforts of your life. But

there! ascend that rock, Independence, and look justly down on their littleness of soul. Make the worthless tremble under your indignation, and the foolish sink before your contempt; and largely impart that happiness to others which, I am certain, will give yourselves so much pleasure to bestow."

Why, dear Madam, must I wake from this delightful reverie, and find it all a dream? Why, amid my generous enthusiasm, must I find myself poor and powerless, incapable of wiping one tear from the eye of pity, or of adding one comfort to the friend I love!—Out upon the world! say I, that its affairs are administered so ill! They talk of reform;—good Heaven! what a reform would I make among the sons, and even the daughters of men!—Down, immediately, should go fools from the high places where misbegotten chance has perked them up, and through life should they skulk, ever haunted by their native insignificance, as the body marches accompanied by its shadow.—As for a much more formidable class, the knaves, I am at a loss what to do with them: had I a world, there should not be a knave in it.

But the hand that could give, I would liberally fill: and I would pour delight on the heart that could kindly forgive, and generously love.

Still the inequalities of life are, among men, comparatively tolerable—but there is a delicacy, a tenderness, accompanying every view in which we can place lovely Woman, that are grated and shocked at the rude, capricious distinctions of Fortune. Woman is the blood-royal of life: let there be slight degrees of precedency among them—but let them be ALL sacred.—Whether this last sentiment be right or wrong, I am not accountable; it is an original component feature of my mind.

R. B.

No. CCXIII.

TO MRS DUNLOP.

ELLISLAND, *17th December*, 1791.

MANY thanks to you, Madam, for your good news respecting the little floweret and the mother-plant. I hope my poetic prayers have been heard, and will be answered up to the warmest sincerity of their fullest extent; and then Mrs Henri will find her little darling the representative of his late parent, in every thing but his abridged existence.

I have just finished the following song, which to a lady the descendant of Wallace—and many heroes of his truly illustrious line—and herself the mother of several soldiers, needs neither preface nor apology.

"*Scene—a field of battle—time of the day, evening; the wounded and dying of the victorious army are supposed to join in the following*

SONG OF DEATH.

Farewell, thou fair day, thou green earth, and ye skies
Now gay with the bright setting sun;
Farewell, loves and friendships, ye dear, tender ties—
Our race of existence is run!"

(*See vol.* ii. *page* 105.)

The circumstance that gave rise to the foregoing verses, was, looking over with a musical friend M'Donald's collection of Highland airs, I was struck with one, an Isle of Skye tune, entitled 'Oran an Aoig, or, the Song of Death,' to the measure of which I have adapted my stanzas. I have of late composed two or three other little pieces, which, ere yon full-orbed moon, whose broad impudent face now stares at old mother earth all night, shall have shrunk into a modest crescent, just peeping forth at dewy dawn, I shall find an hour to transcribe for you. *A Dieu je vous commende.*

R. B.

No. CCXIV.

TO MRS DUNLOP.

5th January, 1792.

You see my hurried life, Madam: I can only command starts of time; however, I am glad of one thing; since I finished the other sheet, the political blast that threatened my welfare is over-blown. I have corresponded with Commissioner Graham, for the board had made me the subject of their animadversions; and now I have the pleasure of informing you, that all is set to rights in that quarter. Now as to these informers, may the devil be let loose to —— but, hold! I was praying most fervently in my last sheet, and I must not so soon fall a swearing in this.

Alas! how little do the wantonly or idly officious think what mischief they do by their malicious insinuations, indirect impertinence, or thoughtless blabbings. What a difference there is in intrinsic worth, candour, benevolence, generosity, kindness,—in all the charities and all the virtues; between one class of human beings and another! For instance, the amiable circle I so lately mixed with in the hospitable hall of Dunlop, their generous hearts—their uncontaminated dignified minds—their informed and polished understandings—what a contrast, when compared—if such comparing were not downright sacrilege—with the soul of the miscreant who can deliberately plot the destruction of an honest man that never offended him, and with a grin of satisfaction see the unfortunate being, his faithful wife, and prattling innocents, turned over to beggary and ruin!

Your cup, my dear Madam, arrived safe. I had two worthy fellows dining with me the other day, when I, with great formality, produced my whigmeleerie cup, and told them that it had been a family-piece among the descendants of William Wallace. This roused such an enthusiasm, that

they insisted on bumpering the punch round in it; and by and by, never did your great ancestor lay a *Suthron* more completely to rest, than for a time did your cup my two friends. Apropos, this is the season of wishing. May God bless you, my dear friend, and bless me, the humblest and sincerest of your friends, by granting you yet many returns of the season! May all good things attend you and yours wherever they are scattered over the earth!

R. B.

No. CCXV.

TO MR WILLIAM SMELLIE, PRINTER.

DUMFRIES, 22*d January*, 1792.

I SIT down, my dear Sir, to introduce a young lady to you, and a lady in the first ranks of fashion, too. What a task! to you—who care no more for the herd of animals called young ladies than you do for the herd of animals called young gentlemen. To you—who despise and detest the groupings and combinations of fashion, as an idiot painter that seems industrious to place staring fools and unprincipled knaves in the foreground of his picture, while men of sense and honesty are too often thrown in the dimmest shades. Mrs Riddel, who will take this letter to town with her, and send it to you, is a character that, even in your own way, as a naturalist and a philosopher, would be an acquisition to your acquaintance. The lady, too, is a votary to the muses; and as I think myself somewhat of a judge in my own trade, I assure you that her verses, always correct, and often elegant, are much beyond the common run of the *lady-poetesses* of the day. She is a great admirer of your book; and, hearing me say that I was acquainted with you, she begged to be known to you, as she is just going to pay her first visit to our Caledonian capital. I told her that her best way was, to desire her near relation,

and your intimate friend, Craigdarroch, to have you at his house while she was there; and lest you might think of a lively West Indian girl of eighteen, as girls of eighteen too often deserve to be thought of, I should take care to remove that prejudice. To be impartial, however, in appreciating the lady's merits, she has one unlucky failing: a failing which you will easily discover, as she seems rather pleased with indulging in it; and a failing that you will easily pardon, as it is a sin which very much besets yourself;—where she dislikes, or despises, she is apt to make no more a secret of it, than where she esteems and respects.

I will not present you with the unmeaning *compliments of the season*, but I will send you my warmest wishes and most ardent prayers, that FORTUNE may never throw your SUBSISTENCE to the mercy of a KNAVE, or set your CHARACTER on the judgment of a FOOL; but, that upright and erect, you may walk to an honest grave, where men of letters shall say, here lies a man who did honour to science, and men of worth shall say, here lies a man who did honour to human nature.

R. B.

No. CCXVI.

TO MR WM. NICOL.

20th February, 1792.

O THOU, wisest among the wise, meridian blaze of prudence, full moon of discretion, and chief of many counsellors! How infinitely is thy puddle-headed, rattle-headed, wrong-headed, round-headed slave indebted to thy supereminent goodness, that from the luminous path of thy own right-lined rectitude, thou lookest benignly down on an erring wretch, of whom the zig-zag wanderings defy all the powers of calculation, from the simple copulation of units,

up to the hidden mysteries of fluxions! May one feeble ray of that light of wisdom which darts from thy sensorium, straight as the arrow of heaven, and bright as the meteor of inspiration, may it be my portion, so that I may be less unworthy of the face and favour of that father of proverbs and master of maxims, that antipode of folly, and magnet among the sages, the wise and witty Willie Nicol! Amen! Amen! Yea, so be it!

For me! I am a beast, a reptile, and know nothing! From the cave of my ignorance, amid the fogs of my dulness, and pestilential fumes of my political heresies, I look up to thee, as doth a toad through the iron-barred lucerne of a pestiferous dungeon, to the cloudless glory of a summer sun! Sorely sighing in bitterness of soul, I say, when shall my name be the quotation of the wise, and my countenance be the delight of the godly, like the illustrious lord of Laggan's many hills? As for him, his works are perfect: never did the pen of calumny blur the fair page of his reputation, nor the bolt of hatred fly at his dwelling.

Thou mirror of purity, when shall the elfine lamp of my glimmerous understanding, purged from sensual appetites and gross desires, shine like the constellation of thy intellectual powers.—As for thee, thy thoughts are pure, and thy lips are holy. Never did the unhallowed breath of the powers of darkness, and the pleasures of darkness, pollute the sacred flame of thy sky-descended and heaven-bound desires: never did the vapours of impurity stain the unclouded serene of thy cerulean imagination. O that like thine were the tenor of my life, like thine the tenor of my conversation! then should no friend fear for my strength, no enemy rejoice in my weakness! Then should I lie down and rise up, and none to make me afraid.—May thy pity and thy prayer be exercised for, O thou lamp of wisdom and mirror of morality! thy devoted slave,

R. B.

No. CCXVII.

TO FRANCIS GROSE, ESQ. F.S.A.

DUMFRIES, 1792.

SIR,

I BELIEVE among all our Scots literati you have not met with professor Dugald Stewart, who fills the moral philosophy chair in the University of Edinburgh. To say that he is a man of the first parts, and what is more, a man of the first worth, to a gentleman of your general acquaintance, and who so much enjoys the luxury of unencumbered freedom and undisturbed privacy, is not perhaps recommendation enough:—but when I inform you that Mr Stewart's principal characteristic is your favourite feature; *that* sterling independence of mind, which, though every man's right, so few men have the courage to claim, and fewer still the magnanimity to support:—When I tell you, that unseduced by splendour, and undisgusted by wretchedness, he appreciates the merits of the various actors in the great drama of life, merely as they perform their parts—in short, he is a man after your own heart, and I comply with his earnest request in letting you know that he wishes above all things to meet with you. His house, Catrine, is within less than a mile of Sorn Castle, which you proposed visiting; or if you could transmit him the inclosed, he would with the greatest pleasure meet you any where in the neighbourhood. I write to Ayrshire to inform Mr Stewart that I have acquitted myself of my promise. Should your time and spirits permit your meeting with Mr Stewart, 'tis well; if not, I hope you will forgive this liberty, and I have at least an opportunity of assuring you with what truth and respect,

I am, Sir,

Your great admirer,

And very humble servant,

R. B.

No. CCXVIII.

TO THE SAME.

DUMFRIES, 1792.

AMONG the many witch stories I have heard, relating to Alloway kirk, I distinctly remember only two or three.

Upon a stormy night, amid whistling squalls of wind, and bitter blasts of hail; in short, on such a night as the devil would choose to take the air in; a farmer or farmer's servant was plodding and plashing homeward with his plough-irons on his shoulder, having been getting some repairs on them at a neighbouring smithy. His way lay by the kirk of Alloway, and being rather on the anxious look out in approaching a place so well known to be a favourite haunt of the devil and the devil's friends and emissaries, he was struck aghast by discovering through the horrors of the storm and stormy night, a light, which on his nearer approach plainly showed itself to proceed from the haunted edifice. Whether he had been fortified from above on his devout supplication, as is customary with people when they suspect the immediate presence of Satan; or whether, according to another custom, he had got courageously drunk at the smithy, I will not pretend to determine; but so it was that he ventured to go up to, nay into the very kirk. As luck would have it his temerity came off unpunished.

The members of the infernal junto were all out on some midnight business or other, and he saw nothing but a kind of kettle or caldron, depending from the roof, over the fire, simmering some heads of unchristened children, limbs of executed malefactors, &c. for the business of the night.—It was, in for a penny, in for a pound, with the honest ploughman: so without ceremony he unhooked the caldron from off the fire, and, pouring out the damnable ingredients, inverted it on his head, and carried it fairly home, where it remained long in the family, a living evidence of the truth of the story.

Another story, which I can prove to be equally authentic, was as follows:

On a market day in the town of Ayr, a farmer from Carrick, and consequently whose way lay by the very gate of Alloway kirk-yard, in order to cross the river Doon at the old Bridge, which is about two or three hundred yards farther on than the said gate, had been detained by his business, till by the time he reached Alloway it was the wizard hour, between night and morning.

Though he was terrified with a blaze streaming from the kirk, yet it is a well-known fact that to turn back on these occasions is running by far the greatest risk of mischief, he prudently advanced on his road. When he had reached the gate of the kirk-yard, he was surprised and entertained, through the ribs and arches of an old gothic window, which still faces the highway, to see a dance of witches merrily footing it round their old sooty blackguard master, who was keeping them all alive with the power of his bag-pipe. The farmer stopping his horse to observe them a little, could plainly descry the faces of many old women of his acquaintance and neighbourhood. How the gentleman was dressed tradition does not say; but that the ladies were all in their smocks: and one of them happening unluckily to have a smock which was considerably too short to answer all the purpose of that piece of dress, our farmer was so tickled, that he involuntarily burst out, with a loud laugh, "Weel luppen, Maggy wi' the short sark!" and recollecting himself, instantly spurred his horse to the top of his speed. I need not mention the universally known fact, that no diabolical power can pursue you beyond the middle of a running stream. Lucky it was for the poor farmer that the river Doon was so near, for notwithstanding the speed of his horse, which was a good one, against he reached the middle of the arch of the bridge, and consequently the middle of the stream, the pursuing, vengeful hags, were so close at his heels, that one of them actually sprung to seize him; but it was too late, nothing was on her side of the stream

but the horse's tail, which immediately gave way at her infernal grip, as if blasted by a stroke of lightning; but the farmer was beyond her reach. However, the unsightly, tail-less, condition of the vigorous steed was to the last hour of the noble creature's life, an awful warning to the Carrick farmers, not to stay too late in Ayr markets.

The last relation I shall give, though equally true, is not so well identified as the two former, with regard to the scene; but as the best authorities give it for Alloway, I shall relate it.

On a summer's evening, about the time nature puts on her sables to mourn the expiry of the cheerful day, a shepherd boy, belonging to a farmer in the immediate neighbourhood of Alloway kirk, had just folded his charge, and was returning home. As he passed the kirk, in the adjoining field, he fell in with a crew of men and women, who were busy pulling stems of the plant Ragwort. He observed that as each person pulled a Ragwort, he or she got astride of it, and called out, "up horsie!" on which the Ragwort flew off, like Pegasus, through the air with its rider. The foolish boy likewise pulled his Ragwort, and cried with the rest, "up horsie!" and, strange to tell, away he flew with the company. The first stage at which the cavalcade stopt, was a merchant's wine cellar in Bourdeaux, where, without saying by your leave, they quaffed away at the best the cellar could afford, until the morning, foe to the imps and works of darkness, threatened to throw light on the matter, and frightened them from their carousals.

The poor shepherd lad, being equally a stranger to the scene and the liquor, heedlessly got himself drunk; and when the rest took horse, he fell asleep, and was found so next day by some of the people belonging to the merchant. Somebody that understood Scotch, asking him what he was, he said such-a-one's herd in Alloway, and by some means or other getting home again, he lived long to tell the world the wondrous tale. R. B.*

* This letter was copied from the 'Censura Literaria,' 1786.

No. CCXIX.

TO MR J. CLARKE, EDINBURGH.

July 16, 1792.

Mr Burns begs leave to present his most respectful compliments to Mr Clarke.—Mr B. some time ago did himself the honour of writing Mr C. respecting coming out to the country, to give a little musical instruction in a highly respectable family, where Mr C. may have his own terms, and may be as happy as indolence, the Devil, and the gout, will permit him. Mr B. knows well how Mr C. is engaged with another family; but cannot Mr C. find two or three weeks to spare to each of them? Mr B. is deeply impressed with, and awfully conscious of, the high importance of Mr C.'s time, whether in the winged moments of symphonious exhibition, at the keys of harmony, while listening seraphs cease their own less delightful strains; or in the drowsy arms of slumb'rous repose, in the arms of his dearly beloved elbow-chair, where the frowsy, but potent power of indolence, circumfuses her vapours round, and sheds her dews on the head of her darling son. But half a line conveying half a meaning from Mr C. would make Mr B. the happiest of mortals.

R. B.

It was communicated to the editor of that work, Sir Egerton Bridges, by Mr Gilchrist of Stamford, with the following remark. "In a collection of miscellaneous papers of the Antiquary Grose, which I purchased a few years since, I found the following letter to him by Burns, when the former was collecting the Antiquities of Scotland: When I premise it was on the second tradition that he afterwards formed the inimitable tale of 'Tam O'Shanter,' I cannot doubt of its being read with great interest. It were 'burning day-light' to point out to a reader (and who is not a reader of Burns?) the thoughts he afterwards transplanted into the rhythmical narrative."—M.

No. CCXX.

TO MRS DUNLOP.

ANNAN WATER FOOT, *22d August*, 1792.

Do not blame me for it, Madam—my own conscience, hackneyed and weather-beaten as it is, in watching and reproving my vagaries, follies, indolence, &c. has continued to punish me sufficiently.

Do you think it possible, my dear and honoured friend, that I could be so lost to gratitude for many favours; to esteem for much worth, and to the honest, kind, pleasurable tie of, now old acquaintance, and I hope and am sure of progressive, increasing friendship—as for a single day, not to think of you—to ask the Fates what they are doing and about to do with my much loved friend and her wide scattered connexions, and to beg of them to be as kind to you and yours as they possibly can?

Apropos! (though how it is apropos, I have not leisure to explain,) Do you know that I am almost in love with an acquaintance of yours?—Almost! said I—I am in love, souce! over head and ears, deep as the most unfathomable abyss of the boundless ocean; but the word Love, owing to the *intermingledoms* of the good and the bad, the pure and the impure, in this world, being rather an equivocal term for expressing one's sentiments and sensations, I must do justice to the sacred purity of my attachment. Know, then, that the heart-struck awe; the distant humble approach; the delight we should have in gazing upon and listening to a Messenger of Heaven, appearing in all the unspotted purity of his celestial home, among the coarse, polluted, far inferior sons of men, to deliver to them tidings that make their hearts swim in joy, and their imaginations soar in transport—such, so delighting and so pure, were the emotions of my soul on meeting the other day with Miss

Lesley Baillie, your neighbour, at M——. Mr B. with his two daughters, accompanied by Mr H. of G., passing through Dumfries a few days ago, on their way to England, did me the honour of calling on me; on which I took my horse, (though God knows I could ill spare the time,) and accompanied them fourteen or fifteen miles, and dined and spent the day with them. 'Twas about nine, I think, when I left them, and, riding home, I composed the following ballad, of which you will probably think you have a dear bargain, as it will cost you another groat of postage. You must know that there is an old ballad beginning with—

"My bonnie Lizie Bailie
I'll rowe thee in my plaidie." &c.

So I parodied it as follows, which is literally the first copy, "unanointed, unanneal'd;" as Hamlet says.—

"O saw ye bonnie Lesley
As she gaed o'er the border?
She's gane, like Alexander,
To spread her conquests farther."

[*See vol.* iii. *page* 58].

So much for ballads. I regret that you are gone to the east country, as I am to be in Ayrshire in about a fortnight. This world of ours, notwithstanding it has many good things in it, yet it has ever had this curse, that two or three people, who would be the happier the oftener they met together, are, almost without exception, always so placed as never to meet but once or twice a year, which, considering the few years of a man's life, is a very great "evil under the sun," which I do not recollect that Solomon has mentioned in his catalogue of the miseries of man. I hope and believe that there is a state of existence beyond the grave, where the worthy of this life will renew their former intimacies, with this endearing addition, that "we meet to part no more!"

"Tell us, ye dead,
Will none of you in pity disclose the secret
What 'tis you are, and we must shortly be!"

A thousand times have I made this apostrophe to the de-

parted sons of men, but not one of them has ever thought fit to answer the question. "O that some courteous ghost would blab it out!" but it cannot be; you and I, my friend, must make the experiment by ourselves, and for ourselves. However, I am so convinced that an unshaken faith in the doctrines of religion is not only necessary, by making us better men, but also by making us happier men, that I should take every care that your little godson, and every little creature that shall call me father, shall be taught them.

So ends this heterogeneous letter, written at this wild place of the world, in the intervals of my labour of discharging a vessel of rum from Antigua.

R. B.

No. CCXXI.

TO MR CUNNINGHAM.

DUMFRIES, 10*th September*, 1792.

No! I will not attempt an apology.—Amid all my hurry of business, grinding the faces of the publican and the sinner on the merciless wheels of the Excise; making ballads, and then drinking, and singing them; and, over and above all, the correcting the press-work of two different publications; still, still I might have stolen five minutes to dedicate to one of the first of my friends and fellow-creatures. I might have done, as I do at present, snatched an hour near "witching time of night," and scrawled a page or two. I might have congratulated my friend on his marriage; or I might have thanked the Caledonian archers for the honour they have done me, (though to do myself justice, I intended to have done both in rhyme, else I had done both long ere now.) Well, then, here is to your good health! for you must know, I have set a nipperkin of toddy by me,

just by way of spell, to keep away the meikle horned Deil, or any of his subaltern imps who may be on their nightly rounds.

But what shall I write to you ?—" The voice said, cry," and I said, " what shall I cry ?"—O, thou spirit! whatever thou art, or wherever thou makest thyself visible! be thou a bogle by the eerie side of an auld thorn, in the dreary glen through which the herd-callan maun bicker in his gloamin route frae the faulde!—Be thou a brownie, set, at dead of night, to thy task by the blazing ingle, or in the solitary barn, where the repercussions of thy iron flail half affright thyself, as thou performest the work of twenty of the sons of men, ere the cock-crowing summon thee to thy ample cog of substantial brose. Be thou a kelpie, haunting the ford or ferry, in the starless night, mixing thy laughing yell with the howling of the storm and the roaring of the flood, as thou viewest the perils and miseries of man on the foundering horse, or in the tumbling boat!—Or, lastly, be thou a ghost, paying thy nocturnal visits to the hoary ruins of decayed grandeur; or performing thy mystic rites in the shadow of the time-worn church, while the moon looks, without a cloud, on the silent, ghastly dwellings of the dead around thee; or taking thy stand by the bedside of the villain, or the murderer, portraying on his dreaming fancy, pictures, dreadful as the horrors of unveiled hell, and terrible as the wrath of incensed Deity!—Come, thou spirit, but not in these horrid forms; come with the milder, gentle, easy inspirations, which thou breathest round the wig of a prating advocate, or the tête of a tea-sipping gossip, while their tongues run at the light-horse gallop of clish-maclaver for ever and ever—come and assist a poor devil who is quite jaded in the attempt to share half an idea among half a hundred words; to fill up four quarto pages, while he has not got one single sentence of recollection, information, or remark worth putting pen to paper for.

I feel, I feel the presence of supernatural assistance!

circled in the embrace of my elbow-chair, my breast labours, like the bloated Sybil on her three-footed stool, and like her too, labours with Nonsense.—Nonsense, auspicious name! Tutor, friend, and finger-post in the mystic mazes of law; the cadaverous paths of physic; and particularly in the sightless soarings of SCHOOL DIVINITY, who, leaving Common Sense confounded at his strength of pinion; Reason delirious with eyeing his giddy flight; and Truth creeping back into the bottom of her well, cursing the hour that ever she offered her scorned alliance to the wizard power of Theologic Vision—raves abroad on all the winds. "On earth discord! a gloomy Heaven above, opening her jealous gates to the nineteen thousandth part of the tithe of mankind! and below, an inescapable and inexorable hell, expanding its leviathan jaws for the vast residue of mortals!!!"—O doctrine! comfortable and healing to the weary, wounded soul of man! Ye sons and daughters of affliction, ye *pauvres miserables*, to whom day brings no pleasure, and night yields no rest, be comforted! "'Tis but *one* to nineteen hundred thousand that your situation will mend in this world;" so alas, the experience of the poor and the needy too often affirms: and 'tis nineteen hundred thousand to *one*, by the dogmas of * * * * * * * *, that you will be damned eternally in the world to come!

But of all Nonsense, Religious Nonsense is the most nonsensical; so enough, and more than enough of it. Only, by the bye, will you, or can you tell me, my dear Cunningham, why a sectarian turn of mind has always a tendency to narrow and illiberalize the heart? They are orderly: they may be just; nay, I have known them merciful: but still your children of sanctity move among their fellow-creatures with a nostril-snuffing putrescence, and a foot-spurning filth, in short, with a conceited dignity that your titled * * * * * * * * or any other of your Scottish lordlings of seven centuries standing, display when they accidentally mix among the many-aproned sons of mechanical life. I remember, in my plough-boy days, I could not conceive it

possible that a noble lord could be a fool, or a godly man could be a knave.—How ignorant are plough-boys!—Nay, I have since discovered that a *godly woman* may be a * * * * *!—But hold—Here's t'ye again—this rum is generous Antigua, so a very unfit menstruum for scandal.

Apropos, how do you like, I mean *really* like, the married life? Ah, my friend! matrimony is quite a different thing from what your love-sick youths and sighing girls take it to be! But marriage, we are told is appointed by God, and I shall never quarrel with any of his institutions. I am a husband of older standing than you, and shall give you *my* ideas of the conjugal state, (*en passant;* you know I am no Latinist, is not *conjugal* derived from *jugum*, a yoke!) Well then, the scale of good wifeship I divide into ten parts.—Goodnature, four; Good Sense, two; Wit, one; Personal Charms, viz. a sweet face, eloquent eyes, fine limbs, graceful carriage, (I would add a fine waist too, but that is so soon spoilt you know) all these, one; as for the other qualities belonging to, or attending on, a wife, such as Fortune, Connexions, Education, (I mean education extraordinary) Family blood, &c. divide the two remaining degrees among them as you please; only, remember that all these minor properties must be expressed by *fractions*, for there is not any one of them, in the aforesaid scale, entitled to the dignity of an *integer*.

As for the rest of my fancies and reveries—how I lately met with Miss Lesley Baillie, the most beautiful, elegant woman in the world—how I accompanied her and her father's family fifteen miles on their journey, out of pure devotion, to admire the loveliness of the works of God, in such an unequalled display of them—how, in galloping home at night, I made a ballad on her, of which these two stanzas make a part—

Thou, bonnie Lesley, art a queen,
Thy subjects we before thee;
Thou, bonnie Lesley, art divine,
The hearts o' men adore thee.

The very Deil he could na scathe
Whatever wad belang thee!
He'd look into thy bonnie face
And say, 'I canna wrang thee'—

behold all these things are written in the chronicles of my imaginations, and shall be read by thee, my dear friend, and by thy beloved spouse, my other dear friend, at a more convenient season.

Now, to thee, and to thy before-designed *bosom*-companion, be given the precious things brought forth by the sun, and the precious things brought forth by the moon, and the benignest influences of the stars, and the living streams which flow from the fountains of life, and by the tree of life, for ever and ever! Amen!

R. B.

No. CCXXII.

TO MRS DUNLOP.

DUMFRIES, 24*th September*, 1792.

I HAVE this moment, my dear Madam, yours of the twenty-third. All your other kind reproaches, your news, &c. are out of my head when I read and think on Mrs. H——'s situation. Good God! a heart-wounded helpless young woman—in a strange, foreign land, and that land convulsed with every horror that can harrow the human feelings—sick—looking, longing for a comforter, but finding none—a mother's feelings, too:—but it is too much: he who wounded (he only can) may He heal!

I wish the farmer great joy of his new acquisition to his family. * * * * * * I cannot say that I give him joy of his life as a farmer. 'Tis, as a farmer paying a dear, unconscionable rent, a *cursed life!* As to a laird farming his own property; sowing his own corn in hope; and reaping it, in spite of brittle weather, in gladness; knowing that none can say unto him, 'what dost thou?'—fattening his

herds; shearing his flocks; rejoicing at Christmas; and begetting sons and daughters, until he be the venerated, grey-haired leader of a little tribe—'tis a heavenly life! but Devil take the life of reaping the fruits that another must eat.

Well, your kind wishes will be gratified, as to seeing me when I make my Ayrshire visit. I cannot leave Mrs B——, until her nine months' race is run, which may perhaps be in three or four weeks. She, too, seems determined to make me the patriarchal leader of a band. However, if Heaven will be so obliging as to let me have them in the proportion of three boys to one girl, I shall be so much the more pleased. I hope, if I am spared with them, to show a set of boys that will do honour to my cares and name; but I am not equal to the task of rearing girls. Besides, I am too poor; a girl should always have a fortune. Apropos, your little godson is thriving charmingly, but is a very devil. He, though two years younger, has completely mastered his brother. Robert is indeed the mildest, gentlest creature I ever saw. He has a most surprising memory, and is quite the pride of his schoolmaster.

You know how readily we get into prattle upon a subject dear to our heart: you can excuse it. God bless you and yours! R. B.

No. CCXXIII.

TO MRS DUNLOP.

Supposed to have been written on the Death of Mrs H——, her Daughter.

I HAD been from home, and did not receive your letter until my return the other day. What shall I say to comfort you, my much-valued, much-afflicted friend! I can

but grieve with you; consolation I have none to offer, except that which religion holds out to the children of affliction—*children of affliction!*—how just the expression! and like every other family, they have matters among them which they hear, see, and feel in a serious, all-important manner, of which the world has not, nor cares to have, any idea. The world looks indifferently on, makes the passing remark, and proceeds to the next novel occurrence.

Alas, Madam! who would wish for many years? What is it but to drag existence until our joys gradually expire, and leave us in a night of misery: like the gloom which blots out the stars one by one, from the face of night, and leaves us, without a ray of comfort, in the howling waste!

I am interrupted, and must leave off. You shall soon hear from me again. R. B.

No. CCXXIV.

TO MRS DUNLOP.

DUMFRIES, *6th December*, 1792.

I SHALL be in Ayrshire, I think, next week; and, if at all possible, I shall certainly, my much esteemed friend, have the pleasure of visiting at Dunlop-house.

Alas, Madam! how seldom do we meet in this world, that we have reason to congratulate ourselves on accessions of happiness! I have not passed half the ordinary term of an old man's life, and yet I scarcely look over the obituary of a newspaper, that I do not see some names that I have known, and which I, and other acquaintances, little thought to meet with there so soon. Every other instance of the mortality of our kind, makes us cast an anxious look into the dreadful abyss of uncertainty, and shudder with apprehension for our own fate. But of how different an importance are the lives of different individuals? Nay, of what importance is one period of the same life, more than another?

A few years ago, I could have laid down in the dust, "careless of the voice of the morning;" and now not a few, and these most helpless individuals, would, on losing me and my exertions, lose both their "staff and shield." By the way, these helpless ones have lately got an addition; Mrs B—— having given me a fine girl since I wrote you. There is a charming passage in Thomson's 'Edward and Eleanora:'

> "The valiant, *in himself*, what can he suffer?
> Or what need he regard his *single* woes?" &c.

As I am got in the way of quotations, I shall give you another from the same piece, peculiarly, alas! too peculiarly apposite, my dear Madam, to your present frame of mind:

> "Who so unworthy but may proudly deck him
> With his fair-weather virtue, that exults
> Glad o'er the summer main? the tempest comes,
> The rough winds rage aloud; when from the helm
> This virtue shrinks, and in a corner lies
> Lamenting.—Heavens! if privileged from trial
> How cheap a thing were virtue!"

I do not remember to have heard you mention Thomson's dramas. I pick up favourite quotations, and store them in my mind as ready armour, offensive or defensive, amid the struggle of this turbulent existence. Of these is one, a very favourite one, from his 'Alfred:'

> "Attach thee firmly to the virtuous deeds
> And offices of life; to life itself,
> With all its vain and transient joys, sit loose."

Probably I have quoted some of these to you formerly, as indeed when I write from the heart, I am apt to be guilty of such repetitions. The compass of the heart, in the musical style of expression, is much more bounded than that of the imagination; so the notes of the former are extremely apt to run into one another; but in return for the paucity of its compass, its few notes are much more sweet. I must still give you another quotation, which I am almost sure I have given you before, but I cannot resist the temp-

tation. The subject is religion—speaking of its importance to mankind, the author says,

"'Tis this, my friend, that streaks our morning bright."

I see you are in for double postage, so I shall e'en scribble out t'other sheet. We in this country here, have many alarms of the reforming, or rather the republican spirit, of your part of the kingdom. Indeed we are a good deal in commotion ourselves. For me, I am a placeman, you know; a very humble one indeed, Heaven knows, but still so much as to gag me. What my private sentiments are, you will find out without an interpreter.

I have taken up the subject, and the other day, for a pretty actress's benefit night, I wrote an address, which I will give on the other page, called 'The Rights of Woman:'

"While Europe's eye is fixed on mighty things."

[*See vol.* ii. *page* 32.]

I shall have the honour of receiving your criticisms in person at Dunlop. R. B.

No. CCXXV.

TO R. GRAHAM, ESQ. FINTRY.

December, 1792.

SIR,

I HAVE been surprised, confounded, and distracted by Mr Mitchel, the collector, telling me that he has received an order from your Board to inquire into my political conduct, and blaming me as a person disaffected to government.

Sir, you are a husband—and a father.—You know what you would feel, to see the much-loved wife of your bosom, and your helpless, prattling little ones, turned adrift into the world, degraded and disgraced from a situation in which they had been respectable and respected, and left almost

without the necessary support of a miserable existence. Alas, Sir! must I think that such, soon, will be my lot! and from the damned, dark insinuations of hellish groundless envy too! I believe, Sir, I may aver it, and in the sight of Omniscience, that I would not tell a deliberate falsehood, no, not though even worse horrors, if worse can be, than those I have mentioned, hung over my head; and I say, that the allegation, whatever villain has made it, is a lie! To the British Constitution, on revolution principles, next after my God, I am most devoutly attached. You, Sir, have been much and generously my friend; Heaven knows how warmly I have felt the obligation, and how gratefully I have thanked you.—Fortune, Sir, has made you powerful, and me impotent; has given you patronage, and me dependence.—I would not for my single self, call on your humanity; were such my insular, unconnected situation, I would despise the tear that now swells in my eye—I could brave misfortune, I could face ruin; for at the worst, "Death's thousand doors stand open;" but, good God! the tender concerns that I have mentioned, the claims and ties that I see at this moment, and feel around me, how they unnerve Courage, and wither Resolution! To your patronage, as a man of some genius, you have allowed me a claim; and your esteem, as an honest man, I know is my due: to these, Sir, permit me to appeal; by these may I adjure you to save me from that misery which threatens to overwhelm me, and which, with my latest breath I will say it, I have not deserved. R. B.

No. CCXXVI.

TO MRS DUNLOP.

DUMFRIES, 31*st December*, 1792.

DEAR MADAM,

A HURRY of business, thrown in heaps by my absence, has until now prevented my returning my grateful acknow-

ledgments to the good family of Dunlop, and you in particular, for that hospitable kindness which rendered the four days I spent under that genial roof, four of the pleasantest I ever enjoyed.—Alas, my dearest friend! how few and fleeting are those things we call pleasures! on my road to Ayrshire, I spent a night with a friend whom I much valued; a man whose days promised to be many; and on Saturday last we laid him in the dust!

Jan. 2d, 1793.

I HAVE just received yours of the 30th, and feel much for your situation. However, I heartily rejoice in your prospect of recovery from that vile jaundice. As to myself, I am better, though not quite free of my complaint.—You must not think, as you seem to insinuate, that in my way of life I want exercise. Of that I have enough; but occasional hard drinking is the devil to me. Against this I have again and again bent my resolution, and have greatly succeeded. Taverns I have totally abandoned: it is the private parties in the family way, among the hard drinking gentlemen of this country, that do me the mischief—but even this, I have more than half given over.*

* The following extract from a letter addressed by Mr Bloomfield to the Earl of Buchan, contains so interesting an exhibition of the modesty inherent in real worth, and so philosophical, and at the same time so poetical an estimate of the different characters and destinies of Burns and its author, that I should esteem myself culpable were I to withhold it from the public view.

"The illustrious soul that has left amongst us the name of Burns, has often been lowered down to a comparison with me; but the comparison exists more in circumstances than in essentials. That man stood up with the stamp of superior intellect on his brow; a visible greatness: and great and patriotic subjects would only have called into action the powers of his mind, which lay inactive while he played calmly and exquisitely the pastoral pipe.

"The letters to which I have alluded in my preface to the 'Rural Tales,' were friendly warnings, pointed with immediate reference to the fate of that extraordinary man. 'Remember Burns,' has been the watch-word of my friends. I do remember Burns; but I *am not* Burns! neither have I his fire to fan or to quench; nor his passions to control! Where then is my merit

Mr Corbet can be of little service to me at present; at least I should be shy of applying. I cannot possibly be settled as a supervisor, for several years. I must wait the rotation of the list, and there are twenty names before mine.—I might indeed get a job of officiating, where a settled supervisor was ill, or aged; but that hauls me from my family, as I could not remove them on such an uncertainty. Besides, some envious, malicious devil, has raised a little demur on my political principles, and I wish to let that matter settle before I offer myself too much in the eye of my supervisors. I have set, henceforth, a seal on my lips, as to these unlucky politics; but to you, I must breathe my sentiments. In this, as in every thing else, I shall show the undisguised emotions of my soul. War I deprecate: misery and ruin to thousands, are in the blast that announces the destructive demon.

R. B.

No. CCXXVII.

TO MR CUNNINGHAM.

3d March, 1793.

Since I wrote to you the last lugubrious sheet, I have not had time to write you farther. When I say that I had not time, that, as usual, means, that the three demons, indolence, business, and ennui, have so completely shared my hours among them, as not to leave me a five minutes' fragment to take up a pen in.

if I make a peaceful voyage on a smooth sea and with no mutiny on board? To a lady (I have it from herself), who remonstrated with him on his danger from drink, and the pursuits of some of his associates, he replied, 'Madam, they would not thank me for my company, if I did not drink with them.—I *must* give them a slice of my constitution.' How much to be regretted that he did not give them thinner slices of his constitution, that it might have lasted longer!"—*Cromek.*

Thank heaven, I feel my spirits buoying upwards with the renovating year. Now I shall in good earnest take up Thomson's songs. I dare say he thinks I have used him unkindly, and I must own with too much appearance of truth. Apropos, do you know the much admired old Highland air called 'the Sutor's Dochter?' It is a first-rate favourite of mine, and I have written what I reckon one of my best songs to it. I will send it to you as it was sung with great applause in some fashionable circles by Major Robertson, of Lude, who was here with his corps.

There is one commission that I must trouble you with. I lately lost a valuable seal, a present from a departed friend, which vexes me much.

I have gotten one of your Highland pebbles, which I fancy would make a very decent one; and I want to cut my armorial bearing on it; will you be so obliging as inquire what will be the expense of such a business? I do not know that my name is matriculated, as the heralds call it, at all; but I have invented arms for myself, so you know I shall be chief of the name; and, by courtesy of Scotland, will likewise be entitled to supporters. These, however, I do not intend having on my seal. I am a bit of a herald, and shall give you, *secundum artem*, my arms. On a field, azure, a holly bush, seeded, proper, in base; a shepherd's pipe and crook, saltier-wise, also proper, in chief. On a wreath of the colours, a wood-lark perching on a sprig of bay-tree, proper, for crest. Two mottoes; round the top of the crest, *Wood notes wild;* at the bottom of the shield, in the usual place, *Better a wee bush than nae bield.* By the shepherd's pipe and crook I do not mean the nonsense of painters of Arcadia, but a *Stock and Horn*, and a *Club*, such as you see at the head of Allan Ramsay, in Allan's quarto edition of the 'Gentle Shepherd.' By the bye, do you know Allan? He must be a man of very great genius —Why is he not more known?—Has he no patrons? or do "Poverty's cold wind and crushing rain beat keen and heavy" on him? I once, and but once, got a glance

of that noble edition of the noblest pastoral in the world: and dear as it was, I mean, dear as to my pocket, I would have bought it; but I was told that it was printed and engraved for subscribers only. He is the *only* artist who has hit *genuine* pastoral *costume*. What, my dear Cunningham, is there in riches, that they narrow and harden the heart so? I think, that were I as rich as the sun, I should be as generous as the day; but as I have no reason to imagine my soul a nobler one than any other man's, I must conclude that wealth imparts a bird-lime quality to the possessor, at which the man, in his native poverty, would have revolted. What has led me to this, is the idea of such merit as Mr Allan possesses, and such riches as a nabob or government contractor possesses, and why they do not form a mutual league. Let wealth shelter and cherish unprotected merit, and the gratitude and celebrity of that merit will richly repay it.

R. B.*

* "The seal with the arms which the ingenious poet invented for his house was carefully cut in Edinburgh and hung at his watch for several years. It is still in the family and regarded as a relick.

"That Burns admired such a painter as Allan was to be expected: they both wrought on nature of Scottish growth, and both excelled in pictures of humour and glee. 'As an artist, however, Allan's merits are of a limited nature; he neither excelled in fine drawing nor in harmonious colouring, and grace and grandeur were beyond his reach. He painted portraits, which are chiefly remarkable for a strong homely resemblance: he painted landscapes, but these want light and air; and he attempted the historical, but, save in one picture, 'The Corinthian Maid,' all his efforts in that way were failures. His genius lay in expression, especially in grave humour and open drollery. Yet it would be difficult perhaps to name one of his pictures where nature is not overcharged: he could not stop his hand till he had driven his subject into the debatable land that lies between truth and caricature. He is among painters, what Allan Ramsay is among poets, a fellow of infinite humour, and excelling in all manner of rustic drollery, but deficient in fine sensibility of conception, and little acquainted with lofty emotion or high imagination."

"To the above brief character which I wrote for the Lives of

No. CCXXVIII.

TO MISS BENSON,

NOW MRS BASIL MONTAGU.

DUMFRIES, 21*st March*, 1793.

MADAM,

AMONG many things for which I envy those hale, long-lived old fellows before the flood, is this in particular, that when they met with any body after their own heart, they had a charming long prospect of many, many happy meetings with them in after-life.

Now, in this short, stormy, winter day of our fleeting existence, when you now and then, in the Chapter of Accidents, meet an individual whose acquaintance is a real acquisition, there are all the probabilities against you, that you shall never meet with that valued character more. On the other hand, brief as this miserable being is, it is none of the least of the miseries belonging to it, that if there is any miscreant whom you hate, or creature whom you despise, the ill-run of the chances shall be so against you, that in the over-takings, turnings, and jostlings of life, pop, at some unlucky corner, eternally comes the wretch upon you, and will not allow your indignation or contempt a moment's repose. As I am a sturdy believer in the powers of darkness, I take these to be the doings of that old author of

the British Artists, in Murray's Family Library, may be added, from the same source, that Allan was born at Alloa, in Stirlingshire; studied in Glasgow and at Rome; returned to his native land, became Master of the Edinburgh Academy, and died there 6th August, 1796, in the fifty-third year of his age. In person he was under the middle size, his form slender, his face coarse and long, and his hair of the colour of sand. His looks were mean and unpromising, till he was in company to his liking, when his large grey eyes grew bright and penetrating, his manners pleasing, and his conversation sprightly and humorous, inclining to satire, and replete with observation and anecdote."—*Cunningham.*

mischief, the devil. It is well-known that he has some kind of short-hand way of taking down our thoughts, and I make no doubt that he is perfectly acquainted with my sentiments respecting Miss Benson: how much I admired her abilities and valued her worth, and how very fortunate I thought myself in her acquaintance. For this last reason, my dear Madam, I must entertain no hopes of the very great pleasure of meeting with you again.

Miss Hamilton tells me that she is sending a packet to you, and I beg leave to send you the inclosed sonnet, though, to tell you the real truth, the sonnet is a mere pretence, that I may have the opportunity of declaring with how much respectful esteem I have the honour to be, &c.

R. B.

No. CCXXIX.

TO PATRICK MILLER, ESQ.

OF DALSWINTON.

DUMFRIES, *April*, 1793.

SIR,

MY poems having just come out in another edition, will you do me the honour to accept of a copy? A mark of my gratitude to you, as a gentleman to whose goodness I have been much indebted; of my respect for you, as a patriot who, in a venal, sliding age, stands forth the champion of the liberties of my country; and of my veneration for you, as a man, whose benevolence of heart does honour to human nature.

There *was* a time, Sir, when I was your dependant: this language *then* would have been like the vile incense of flattery—I could not have used it.—Now that connexion * is at

* Alluding to the time when he held the farm of Ellisland, as tenant to Mr Miller.

an end, do me the honour to accept of this *honest* tribute of respect from, Sir,

Your much indebted humble servant,

R. B.

No. CCXXX.

TO JOHN FRANCIS ERSKINE,* ESQ.

OF MAR.

DUMFRIES, 18*th April*, 1793.

SIR,

DEGENERATE as human nature is said to be—and in many instances, worthless and unprincipled it is—still there are bright examples to the contrary: examples that, even in the eyes of superior beings, must shed a lustre on the name of Man.

Such an example have I now before me, when you, Sir, came forward to patronise and befriend a distant obscure stranger, merely because poverty had made him helpless, and his British hardihood of mind had provoked the arbitrary wantonness of power. My much esteemed friend, Mr Riddel of Glenriddel, has just read me a paragraph of

* This gentleman most obligingly favoured the Editor with a perfect copy of the original letter, and allowed him to lay it before the public.—It is partly printed in Dr Currie's Edition.

It will be necessary to state, that in consequence of the poet's freedom of remark on public measures, maliciously misrepresented to the Board of Excise, he was represented as actually dismissed from his office.—This report induced Mr Erskine to propose a subscription in his favour, which was refused by the poet with that elevation of sentiment that peculiarly characterized his mind, and which is so happily displayed in this letter. See letter to R. Graham of Fintry, Dec. 1792, written by Burns, with even more than his accustomed pathos and eloquence, in further explanation.—*Cromek.*

a letter he had from you. Accept, Sir, of the silent throb of gratitude; for words would but mock the emotions of my soul.

You have been misinformed as to my final dismission from the Excise; I am still in the service.—Indeed, but for the exertions of a gentleman who must be known to you, Mr Graham of Fintry, a gentleman who has ever been my warm and generous friend, I had, without so much as a hearing, or the slightest previous intimation, been turned adrift, with my helpless family, to all the horrors of want. —Had I had any other resource, probably I might have saved them the trouble of a dismission; but the little money I gained by my publication, is almost every guinea embarked, to save from ruin an only brother, who, though one of the worthiest, is by no means one of the most fortunate of men.

In my defence to their accusations, I said, that whatever might be my sentiments of republics, ancient or modern, as to Britain, I abjured the idea:—That a CONSTITUTION, which, in its original principles, experience had proved to be every way fitted for our happiness in society, it would be insanity to sacrifice to an untried visionary theory:—That, in consideration of my being situated in a department, however humble, immediately in the hands of people in power, I had forborne taking any active part, either personally, or as an author, in the present business of REFORM. But that, where I must declare my sentiments, I would say there existed a system of corruption between the executive power and the representative part of the legislature, which boded no good to our glorious CONSTITUTION; and which every patriotic Briton must wish to see amended.—Some such sentiments as these, I stated in a letter to my generous patron Mr Graham, which he laid before the Board at large; where, it seems, my last remark gave great offence; and one of our supervisors general, a Mr Corbet, was instructed to inquire on the spot, and to document me—"that my business was to act, *not to think*; and that what-

ever might be men or measures, it was for me to be *silent* and *obedient*."

Mr Corbet was likewise my steady friend; so between Mr Graham and him, I have been partly forgiven; only I understand that all hopes of my getting officially forward, are blasted.

Now, Sir, to the business in which I would more immediately interest you. The partiality of my COUNTRYMEN has brought me forward as a man of genius, and has given me a character to support. In the POET I have avowed manly and independent sentiments, which I trust will be found in the MAN. Reasons of no less weight than the support of a wife and family, have pointed out as the eligible, and situated as I was, the only eligible line of life for me, my present occupation. Still my honest fame is my dearest concern; and a thousand times have I trembled at the idea of those *degrading* epithets that malice or misrepresentation may affix to my name. I have often, in blasting anticipation, listened to some future hackney scribbler, with the heavy malice of savage stupidity, exulting in his hireling paragraphs—"BURNS, notwithstanding the *fanfaronade* of independence to be found in his works, and after having been held forth to public view, and to public estimation as a man of some genius, yet, quite destitute of resources within himself to support his borrowed dignity, he dwindled into a paltry exciseman, and slunk out the rest of his insignificant existence in the meanest of pursuits, and among the vilest of mankind."

In your illustrious hands, Sir, permit me to lodge my disavowal and defiance of these slanderous falsehoods. BURNS was a poor man from birth, and an exciseman by necessity: but—*I will* say it! the sterling of his honest worth, no poverty could debase, and his independent British mind, oppression might bend, but could not subdue. Have not I, to me, a more precious stake in my country's welfare, than the richest dukedom in it?—I have a large family of children, and the prospect of many more. I have three

sons, who, I see already, have brought into the world souls ill qualified to inhabit the bodies of SLAVES.—Can I look tamely on, and see any machination to wrest from them the birthright of my boys,—the little independent BRITONS, in whose veins runs my own blood?—No! I will not! should my heart's blood stream around my attempt to defend it!

Does any man tell me, that my full efforts can be of no service; and that it does not belong to my humble station to meddle with the concern of a nation?

I can tell him, that it is on such individuals as I, that a nation has to rest, both for the hand of support, and the eye of intelligence. The uninform'd MOB may swell a nation's bulk; and the titled, tinsel, courtly throng, may be its feathered ornament; but the number of those who are elevated enough in life to reason and to reflect, yet low enough to keep clear of the venal contagion of a court!—these are a nation's strength.

I know not how to apologise for the impertinent length of this epistle; but one small request I must ask of you farther—When you have honoured this letter with a perusal, please to commit it to the flames. BURNS, in whose behalf you have so generously interested yourself, I have here, in his native colours, drawn *as he is;* but should any of the people in whose hands is the very bread he eats, get the least knowledge of the picture, *it would ruin the poor* BARD *for ever!*

My poems having just come out in another edition, I beg leave to present you with a copy as a small mark of that high esteem and ardent gratitude, with which I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your deeply indebted,

And ever devoted humble servant,

R. B.*

* "Erskine of Mar gave a copy of the Poet's letter to Cromek, who published it in the 'Reliques:' It was rumoured that Burns was not only admonished by the Board of Excise but ac-

No. CCXXXI.

TO MR ROBERT AINSLIE.

April 26, 1793.

I AM terribly out of humour, my dear Ainslie, and that is the reason why I take up my pen to *you;* 'tis the nearest way (*probatum est*), to recover my spirits again.

tually dismissed from his situation: this induced Erskine to propose a subscription in his favour, which was refused by the bard with that elevation of sentiment which characterized his mind. It was well that the future Earl of Mar heard the report, since it drew from Burns this truly manly and well considered letter—it was all but the latest act of his life to write it down from his memory among his memoranda. And yet men are not wanting who impeach the accuracy of the poet: of these the chief is Mr Findlater, his superior officer in Dumfries at the time. That gentleman eulogizes the conduct of the Board of Excise: avers that the bard received only a gentle—a courteous admonition, and was never for a moment in danger of being dismissed. He has fairly given the lie to the poet, and the question is, to whose statement are we to attach credit. Burns informs Graham that Mitchell had confounded him with the information, that he had received orders to inquire into his political conduct, for he was blamed as a person disaffected to the government. Does Mr Findlater deny that the collector was so commissioned? In the present letter the poet farther says, that but for the interposition of Graham of Fintry, he would have been turned adrift with his helpless family to all the horrors of want: and moreover that he was documented by the Board, that his business was to act, not to think, and that whatever might be men and measures, it was his duty to be silent and obedient.

"Those who contradict the testimony of Burns should do it on better authority than their own assertion: the poet's word will weigh down any other man's, so long as he speaks from his own knowledge. Findlater argues, Burns states facts. The poet is supported by the testimony of Robert Ainslie, to whom all his affairs were known. in a letter to the editor, dated 3rd September, 1834, without being aware that his illustrious friend's assertions were impeached, he says, "You know that the poet was a 'friend of the people' during the days of political ferment in his time: a circumstance which impeded his advancement in the excise—he never rose higher than the 'nicked stick,' the badge and implement of a common gauger. The Commissioners of Excise, irritated at his opinions, wrote him a formal official let-

I received your letter, and was much entertained with it; but I will not at this time, nor at any other time, answer it.—Answer a letter! I never could answer a letter in my life! —I have written many a letter in return for letters I have

ter, sealed with the large seal of office, informing him that a 'petty officer' had 'no business with politics.'" The proud heart of Burns did not like this humbling: after a few wrathful words in secret to one of his friends, he took a pencil and wrote these lines on the envelope:

'In politics if you would mix,
And low your station be,
Keep this in mind—be deaf and blind,
Let great folks hear and see.'"

Cunningham.

As the name of Mr Findlater is mentioned in the above note, we think it right to give that gentleman's statements on the same subject. After the appearance of the first volume of Cunningham's edition of Burns, containing the Life of the Poet, Mr F. addressed the following communication in February 1834, to the editor of the Glasgow Courier Newspaper:—

"SIR,—You cannot, I dare say, have failed to observe that few of our Scottish poets have had so many biographers, and writers of remarks and strictures on their works, life, and conduct, as Robert Burns. Some have lauded him to the skies, while others have treated him with an extreme degree of harshness and severity. On the whole, however, the former sentiment seems latterly to prevail; and, as these discussions have been handled by abler pens than mine, I by no means intend to obtrude my opinion of his merits here.

"An idea, however, having gone abroad that he was illiberally and cruelly treated by the Board of Excise, which, it is broadly insinuated, arrested his promotion, crushed his spirits, injured his health, and hurried him to a premature grave; and, knowing this opinion to be erroneous, I mean to combat it—but, while I do so, I will take no credit to myself for a generous and chivalric attempt, *exclusively*, to rescue the memory of the Commissioners of Excise (now, I believe, all in the dust) from so unjust an aspersion. Being, in another shape, implicated myself, and my veracity called in question; and this for having stated, (as recorded in Lockhart's Life of Burns) that, when the investigation relative to his political principles took place, "he was subjected to no more, perhaps, than a verbal, or private caution, and to be more circumspect in future; and that neither did I believe his promotion was thereby affected, but that, had he lived, it would

received; but then they were original matter—spurt-away! zig here, zag there; as if the Devil (whom my Grannie often told me, rode on will-o'-wisp,) or, in a more classic phrase, SPUNKIE, were looking over my elbow.—A happy

have gone on in the usual routine.' This is 'the head and front of my offending.' In the review of this work, in a celebrated periodical,* the editor, with much urbanity, as well as good feeling, does not express any doubt of my veracity, but only the extent of my knowledge on the subject, as, after a prefatory compliment, he only says, '*we know better.*' With this, the most fastidious would have had no right to find fault. But, in the late life of the poet, by Allan Cunningham, it is carried a degree further. He says, p. 282 (after quoting what I had said about a private caution,) 'Burns knew best how this was—an order to act, and not to think; and, whatever might be men and measures, to be silent and obedient seems a sharp sort of private caution.' He further adds, after expressing his doubts of a story given of Burns purchasing, and sending to the French Directory, four guns, captured in a smuggling vessel, 'I suspect the story is not more accurate than, that when accused of a leaning to Democracy, he was subjected to no more than, perhaps, a verbal or private caution to be more circumspect in future'—(p. 285.)

"If Mr Cunningham had been fair and polite, I would have been *silent*, and perhaps submissive; but this is so highly coloured, as imperatively to call on me for a vindication, which, I am sorry to say, will unavoidably lead me into a technical, and, of course, disagreeable discussion of excise forms of business, not at all likely to be interesting to the public; but being brought before that dread tribunal in so questionable a way, I am obliged to have recourse to a similar mode of explanation. I have to mention then, that the excise business, even in rebukes and censures to officers, is managed in the most regular and systematic manner; and the following are the degrees, beginning with that for a slight offence:—First, a *verbal caution.* This is not much regarded by young and thoughtless officers, who, in a slang way, say, it breaks no bones,—that is, it does not affect the character, *no record thereof being kept:* immediately, however, these assume a more tangible, and latterly an appalling shape, as the second degree is an admonishment: third, a sharp admonishment: fourth, a reprimand: and fifth, a severe reprimand; all narrating the cause of the censure, and this last concluding with a caveat, that, if the offender does not in future pay more regard to his instructions, he will be suspended or discharged. These

* Blackwood's Magazine.

thought the idea has engendered in my head! SPUNKIE—thou shalt henceforth be my symbol, signature, and tutelary genius! Like thee, hap-step-and-lowp, here-awa-there-awa, higglety-piggelty, pell-mell, hither-and-yon, ram-stam, happy-

are transmitted to the respective Supervisors, to be registered and delivered to the offenders. Nor is this all—a complete register thereof, for all Scotland, is kept by the General Examiner, at the head office, which is examined on every occasion when an officer's character falls to be considered, particularly when any application is made for promotion. Now, if Burns had been subjected to any of all these, except the first, I must, *ex-officio*, have known of it, as it could not have been concealed from me; and I, therefore, consider the authority for what I have stated, on this subject, to be of the most unquestionable and decisive description; such, indeed, as nothing but the most obstinate prejudice will resist: and hence, it is apparent, why *no record* of this business could be found in the excise office, as stated in 'Lockhart's Life,' and more pertinaciously and virulently insisted on by Cunningham—(p. 282.) In truth, there was not much to put on record; chiefly an order from the Board of Excise, to a superior officer, to investigate the complaint; which he having, of course, performed and reported the result, was directed, in return, to caution the Bard as before stated. In this view of the case, I think I may safely appeal to every dispassionate mind, whether any public Board could have exhibited more liberal and humane conduct than appears here. The mildest form of censure is directed—not even a trace of the transaction to be found; and in a short time so totally forgotten, that Burns finds himself not only continued on the list for promotion, but on the very first opportunity that occurred in Dumfries, is actually employed to officiate as a Supervisor; and I say without hesitation, would, if he had lived, have been promoted in his due course; and that at a shorter period of service than any of his predecessors. Nay, he himself, though a good deal alarmed at first, was at length satisfied of this, and writes to his friend, Mrs Dunlop, Dec. 29, 1796, that being now employed to officiate as a Supervisor, he considered his political sins to be forgiven him. Another charge of cruelty has also been brought forward against the Board, that of refusing his full salary during his illness, which a little explanation will set to rights. A few years previous to this period, an addition of £15 per annum had been made to the salaries, accompanied with a condition of being stopped to officers not doing duty. This still existed in Burns' time, and he was no worse treated than others in similar circumstances of indisposition. It is here incumbent on me to mention, that Commissioner Graham, regretting, I have no doubt, his inability to comply with the

go-lucky, up tails-a'-by-the light-o'the moon; has been, is, and shall be, my progress through the mosses and moors of this vile, bleak, barren wilderness of a life of ours.

Poet's wishes as to the full salary, sent him a private donation of £5, which, I believe, nearly, or totally, compensated the loss.

"Upon the whole, therefore, I think I have a right to assume, that the charge of the Poet having his promotion blasted, his spirits crushed, and himself hurried to a premature grave by the cruelty and oppression, or, as Cunningham more graphically, perhaps, designates it, the *racks of the excise*, must fall to the ground. Indeed, so much the contrary is the fact, that instead of obstructing, all his superior officers I have conversed with on the subject were anxiously desirous to see him promoted, and would have lent their every aid to accomplish it. But, alas! the Poet was not fated to see this, and fell a victim to distress and premature death, from other causes than those now ascribed by his biographers. Let the noble, the proud, the great, and the affluent, who ought to be the patrons of genius, consider this and blush!

"I ought, perhaps, to close here, as neither disposed nor qualified to take on me the office of critic; but the notice of a few trifling mistakes in 'Cunningham's Life' will hardly, I presume, come under that designation. At p. 271, Burns is described as having 'his excise labours extended over a long and barren line of sea-coast, upon which he was compelled to keep watch for many a darksome hour, galloping from point to point, to prevent the disembarkation of run goods,' &c. I cannot suppose wilful misrepresentation here, but the author has either been misled or very ill-informed; as after Burns removed into Dumfries from Ellisland, he never kept a horse, nor had any occasion for one in his business; he had no charge whatever of the Dumfries-shire coast —was not compelled to watch the darksome hours, and still less to gallop from point to point to prevent the landing of run goods.— Indeed, except in the isolated emergency of the empty smuggling vessel, brought so prominently forward, and one or two occasions when cargoes of rum from the West Indies were legally 'anded near Annan, where Burns attended as Port-officer, for which he had an extra salary, he had never any occasion, save for his own pleasure, to go beyond the precincts of the town of Dumfries.

"It is painful to enter upon the next article I have in view. At p. 344, is 'presented a melancholy spectacle; the poet dying; his wife in hourly expectation of being confined; four helpless children wandering from room to room, gazing on their miserable parents, and little of food or cordial kind to pacify the whole or soothe the sick.' If *effect* has been studied here, the author has succeeded *à merveille*; but this must not deter me from stating

Come then, my guardian spirit! like thee, may I skip away, amusing myself by and at my own light: and if any opaque-souled lubber of mankind complain that my elfin,

what came under my own observation, and consists with my own knowledge. It is unnecessary, no doubt, to explain that food is a tangible subject, and what every body understands; but the *cordial* is not so easily defined, being probably, in the language of romance, either wine or some other more highly and deliciously concentrated modification of the juice of the grape. In common parlance, however, the family of the Bard wanted none of the necessaries of life, during all the period of my acquaintance with him, and few people, I believe, had better opportunities of knowledge on this subject than myself, or were more frequently in his house, particularly after he came to reside in Dumfries, and in the latter days of his life. On the night, indeed, immediately preceding his decease, I sat by his bedside, and administered the last morsel he ever swallowed, not certainly in the form of medicine, which at that period was totally relinquished as unavailing, nor of the cordial of romance; but what was better fitted to allay his thirst and cool his parched and burning tongue.

"I might extend these animadversions further, but having, I presume, accomplished the object I had in view, I desist.—*Quid multis verbis?*

I am, Sir,
Your most obedient servant,
A. FINDLATER."

GLASGOW, NORTH WELLINGTON PLACE,
February, 1834.

This letter of course, fell into Mr Cunningham's hands, and in the 5th and 7th volumes of his edition of Burns, called in question the truth of some of Mr Findlater's averments. To these, that gentleman replied through the channel above mentioned, in the following terms:

"SIR—When I wrote and sent you a few observations on Cunningham's Life of Burns, at the time of the publication of his first volume, I considered them sufficient to set an often discussed question (threadbare I wot) at rest. That such was the effect with the most of Burns' living relatives, as well as many of his friends, I have great reason to believe; but it appears this was not the case with some of his posthumous, or, as I may designate them, ultra-fastidious friends, particularly his present Biographer, who still perseveres in his unrelenting hostility (I should be loath to use a harsher term) towards the Commissioners of Excise. He now, however, takes a wider and higher range—including the government of the country (at the period in question under the premiership of Wm. Pitt,) in one indiscriminating

lambent, glimmerous wanderings have misled his stupid steps over precipices, or into bogs; let the thick-headed Blunderbuss recollect, that he is not SPUNKIE:—that

and sweeping denunciation of 'eternal dishonour,' (vol. 7, p. 191;) and as he still continues to assail my veracity, who certainly had far better opportunities of knowing the facts than Mr Cunningham could possibly have access to, I consider it incumbent upon me to repel his insinuations; and for this purpose I have again to trouble you with a few further remarks, requesting the insertion thereof in your respectable paper. There is little requiring animadversion till his 5th vol. p. 21, when he begins to nibble, (to use a piscatory phrase,) and start an objection to an assertion of mine, that Burns kept no horse after he came to reside in Dumfries. And will it be believed, that the only argument adduced in contradiction to this is, that Burns, in proceeding to accompany some friends into the country, uses the expression, 'I took my horse'—as if any man, when about to ride, would not say the same thing, or use some such terms, were it the pope's horse, or the sorriest hack in Christendom: and my attention, forsooth, is particularly directed to this circumstance, as of irrefragable importance. But enough of this foolery; and I proceed to notice, that in vol. 7, p. 222, still in the view of invalidating my testimony, he has a note at the bottom, importing that the Poet, in a letter to Mr Erskine on the subject of an inquiry into his conduct, had given a full history of that *dark* transaction, as he terms it—a mode of phraseology, Mr Cunningham seems partial to, thereby rendering truth subservient to *effect*. '*Dark transaction*' is sublime, and doubtless infinitely more dignified than any plain or simple epithet, however genuine or appropriate, would have been; and may, perhaps, recall to a romantic imagination reminiscences of the olden time, when republican Venice was in her glory, and her dismal halls the theatres of many *dark* and atrocious deeds. But I have inadvertently wandered from my subject, infected, I suppose, by the romantic mania, and hasten to remark, that the letter in question was, in all likelihood, written by the Poet while still smarting under his castigation, and under mistaken apprehensions of impending disasters; I say mistaken apprehensions, because on grounds of this kind I am accused of giving Burns the lie, (p. 238.) This I deny; but contend that he overrated, in some degree, the consequences as likely to result from the situation he found himself placed in, nor is it much to be wondered at, all things considered—he, perhaps the most irritable of the 'genus irritabile,' hitherto totally unaccustomed to official censure, and his very inexperience tending to increase his alarm. Mr Cunningham here asks a very unnecessary, I had almost said childish, question—Whether I denied that the Col-

SPUNKIE'S wanderings could not copied be;
Amid these perils none durst walk but he.—

I have no doubt but scholarcraft may be caught, as a Scotsman catches the itch,—by friction. How else can you account for it, that born blockheads, by mere dint of *hand-*

lector was commissioned to inquire into Burns' political offences? and I give him the full benefit of the admission, by declaring that I would hardly think of denying a fact so well known, and so frequently discussed. By way of giving *effect* to the whole, he states a circumstance of Burns receiving an official letter with a large seal, of which I know nothing; and only have to observe thereon, that if the Board of Excise corresponded in this way with Burns, it was a very singular and unique case, as in every other they have no correspondence whatever with that rank of officers, but through the medium of the superior officials. Before concluding, I must admit, that Mr C. in his first vol. (p. 326,) notwithstanding all this, manifests a more kindly feeling towards me, by considering me 'incapable of misrepresentation,' which, though savouring of inconsistency, I am bound to acknowledge; and, after what I have briefly stated now, and formerly, I shall give neither myself nor him any further trouble; and as my veracity is pretty well known to many of my fellow-citizens here, among whom I have sojourned for nearly a quarter of a century, and whose good opinion I am still anxious to retain, though now retired as a public functionary, I take my leave of him with the old saying, 'In mea virtute me involvo.'

"I am, Sir, your obedient Servant,
"A. FINDLATER."

"GLASGOW, *January*, 1835."

Having laid these conflicting statements before the reader, we leave it to every one to deduce his own conclusion. It is only necessary for us to add, that at the time referred to, Mr Findlater was Burns' immediate superior officer; that he was his sincere friend,—came in intimate contact with him almost every day,—was a warm admirer of his genius,—and, to conclude, an unflinching asserter of those same whig principles, which Burns professes to hold in the letter which has created so much discussion. Mr Cunningham, before he impeached the veracity of Mr Findlater, should, in our opinion, have made some allowance for the exaggerations incident to the poetical character, when its sensibilities are even slightly wounded. The Poet looks through one end of the telescope, and the man of business, or of the world, through another, and their report of what they perceive or feel can never consequently agree. There can be no doubt that Burns was politically imprudent; but we have as little doubt, notwithstanding our leaning towards

ling books, grow so wise that even they themselves are equally convinced of and surprised at their own parts? I once carried this philosophy to that degree that in a knot of country folks who had a library amongst them, and who, to the honour of their good sense, made me factotum in the business; one of our members, a little, wise-looking, squat, upr'ght, jabbering body of a tailor, I advised him, instead of turning over the leaves, *to bind the book on his back.*—Johnie took the hint; and as our meetings were every fourth Saturday, and Pricklouse having a good Scots mile to walk in coming, and, of course, another in returning, Bodkin was sure to lay his hand on some heavy quarto, or ponderous folio, with, and under which, wrapt up in his grey plaid, he grew wise, as he grew weary, all the way home. He carried this so far, that an old musty Hebrew concordance, which we had in a present from a neighbouring priest, by mere dint of applying it, as doctors do a blistering plaster, between his shoulders, Stitch, in a dozen pilgrimages, acquired as much rational theology as the said priest had done by forty years' perusal of the pages.

Tell me, and tell me truly, what you think of this theory.

Yours,

SPUNKIE.*

a man of genius, and the sympathy we feel in his real or imaginary woes and grievances, that he was otherwise treated by the Excise, than as detailed by Mr Findlater.—M.

* What a strange hipperty-skipperty letter this is to AINSLIE! that is to say, to AINSLIE as we know him now,—the author of 'The Father's Gift,' and many beautiful little religious works, fitted for youth of both sexes. Ainslie, since ever I knew him, and that has been considerably upwards of twenty years, has been much the same,—a downright honest, sleepy-headed, kind-hearted gentleman, and his good humour never failing him, not even in his sleep, with which he generally favours the company once or twice in an evening. But even then, there is a benevolence in his countenance, that beams more intensely than when he is awake. I have seen him fall asleep in the blue parlour at Ambrose's, with North in the chair, and myself croupier. Honest Ainslie! That is a constitutional failing which he cannot help; for a man of kinder or better intentions never was born. He is

No. CCXXXII.

TO MISS KENNEDY.

MADAM,

PERMIT me to present you with the inclosed song as a small though grateful tribute for the honour of your acquaintance. I have, in these verses, attempted some faint sketches of your portrait in the unembellished simple manner of descriptive TRUTH.—Flattery, I leave to your LOVERS, whose exaggerating fancies may make them imagine you still nearer perfection than you really are.

Poets, Madam, of all mankind, feel most forcibly the powers of BEAUTY; as, if they are really POETS of nature's making, their feelings must be finer, and their taste more delicate than most of the world. In the cheerful bloom of SPRING, or the pensive mildness of AUTUMN; the grandeur of SUMMER, or the hoary majesty of WINTER; the poet feels a charm unknown to the rest of his species. Even the sight of a fine flower, or the company of a fine woman (by far the finest part of God's works below), have sensations for the poetic heart that the HERD of man are strangers to.—On this last account, Madam, I am, as in many other things, indebted to Mr Hamilton's kindness in introducing me to you. Your lovers may view you with a wish, I look on you with pleasure; their hearts, in your presence, may glow with desire, mine rises with admiration.

That the arrows of misfortune, however they should, as incident to humanity, glance a slight wound, may never reach your *heart*—that the snares of villany may never beset you in the road of life—that INNOCENCE may hand you by the path of HONOUR to the dwelling of PEACE, is the sincere wish of him who has the honour to be, &c.

R. B.

now, alas! the only relic that I know of, of the real intimate acquaintances of Burns.—H.

No. CCXXXIII.

TO MISS CRAIK.

DUMFRIES, *August*, 1793.

MADAM,

SOME rather unlooked-for accidents have prevented my doing myself the honour of a second visit to Arbigland, as I was so hospitably invited, and so positively meant to have done.—However, I still hope to have that pleasure before the busy months of harvest begin.

I inclose you two of my late pieces, as some kind of return for the pleasure I have received in perusing a certain MS. volume of poems in the possession of Captain Riddel. To repay one with an *old song*, is a proverb, whose force, you, Madam, I know, will not allow. What is said of illustrious descent is, I believe, equally true of a talent for poetry, none ever despised it who had pretensions to it. The fates and characters of the rhyming tribe often employ my thoughts when I am disposed to be melancholy. There is not, among all the martyrologies that ever were penned, so rueful a narrative as the lives of the poets.—In the comparative view of wretches, the criterion is not what they are doomed to suffer, but how they are formed to bear. Take a being of our kind, give him a stronger imagination and a more delicate sensibility, which between them will ever engender a more ungovernable set of passions than are the usual lot of man; implant in him an irresistible impulse to some idle vagary, such as arranging wild flowers in fantastical nosegays, tracing the grasshopper to his haunt by his chirping song, watching the frisks of the little minnows in the sunny pool, or hunting after the intrigues of butterflies—in short, send him adrift after some pursuit which shall eternally mislead him from the paths of lucre, and yet curse him with a keener relish than any man living for the pleasures that lucre can purchase; lastly, fill up the measure of his woes by bestowing on him a spurning sense of his

own dignity, and you have created a wight nearly as miserable as a poet. To you, Madam, I need not recount the fairy pleasures the muse bestows to counterbalance this catalogue of evils. Bewitching poetry is like bewitching woman; she has in all ages been accused of misleading mankind from the councils of wisdom and the paths of prudence, involving them in difficulties, baiting them with poverty, branding them with infamy, and plunging them in the whirling vortex of ruin; yet, where is the man but must own that all our happiness on earth is not worthy the name —that even the holy hermit's solitary prospect of paradisiacal bliss is but the glitter of a northern sun rising over a frozen region, compared with the many pleasures, the nameless raptures, that we owe to the lovely Queen of the heart of Man!

R. B.*

* "Miss Helen Craik of Arbigland had merit both as a poetess and novelist: her ballads may be compared with those of Macneil, and her novels, amid much graphic force, had a seasoning of the satiric, which rendered them acceptable to all who understood their allusions. She died some years ago at Allonby: she was much of an enthusiast, and lived estranged from her family for a long period of her life. Her father was one of the wisest gentlemen and most sensible improvers of property on the Scottish side of the Solway: his taste, too, in architecture was of a pure kind: he lived to a good old age, and had the misfortune to witness with his own eyes the melancholy death of his only son. The heir of Arbigland, accompanied by some sixteen young men of the parish, set off one summer morning in his pleasure skiff to pay a visit to the English shore: when more than half-way over the Solway, a whirlwind suddenly arose, seized the sails, whirled the skiff around, and down it went with all on board—though a vessel was near, not a soul was saved. The wretched father saw all this from a seat on the top of the house; after the skiff sank he sat still for an hour, looking fixedly, it is said, on the sea. Arbigland is now the property of his grandson, Douglas Hamilton Craik, Esq. The situation on the Solway side is beautiful: the house is a model of proportion and elegant workmanship: the woods, which partly inclose it, are very lofty, and some of the firs of the spruce tribe are of enormous girth. Burns was a frequent visitor here: nor has the ancient hospitality of the house of Craik declined, nor its love of literature."—*Cunningham.*

No. CCXXXIV.

TO LADY GLENCAIRN.

My Lady,

The honour you have done your poor poet, in writing him so very obliging letter, and the pleasure the inclosed beautiful verses have given him, came very seasonably to his aid amid the cheerless gloom and sinking despondency of diseased nerves and December weather. As to forgetting the family of Glencairn, Heaven is my witness with what sincerity I could use those old verses, which please me more in their rude simplicity than the most elegant lines I ever saw.

> If thee, Jerusalem, I forget,
> Skill part from my right hand.
>
> My tongue to my mouth's roof let cleave,
> If I do thee forget,
> Jerusalem, and thee above
> My chief joy do not set.—

When I am tempted to do any thing improper, I dare not, because I look on myself as accountable to your ladyship and family. Now and then when I have the honour to be called to the tables of the great, if I happen to meet with any mortification from the stately stupidity of self-sufficient squires, or the luxurious insolence of upstart nabobs, I get above the creatures by calling to remembrance that I am patronised by the Noble House of Glencairn; and at gala-times, such as New-year's day, a christening, or the Kirn-night, when my punch-bowl is brought from its dusty corner and filled up in honour of the occasion, I begin with,—*The Countess of Glencairn!* My good woman, with the enthusiasm of a grateful heart, next cries, *My Lord!* and so the toast goes on until I end with *Lady Harriet's little angel!* whose epithalamium I have pledged myself to write.

When I received your ladyship's letter, I was just in the

act of transcribing for you some verses I have lately composed; and meant to have sent them my first leisure hour, and acquainted you with my late change of life. I mentioned to my lord, my fears concerning my farm. Those fears were indeed too true; it is a bargain would have ruined me but for the lucky circumstance of my having an excise commission.

People may talk as they please, of the ignominy of the excise; 50*l.* a year will support my wife and children, and keep me independent of the world; and I would much rather have it said that my profession borrowed credit from me, than that I borrowed credit from my profession. Another advantage I have in this business, is the knowledge it gives me of the various shades of human character, consequently assisting me vastly in my poetic pursuits. I had the most ardent enthusiasm for the muses when nobody knew me but myself, and that ardour is by no means cooled now that my lord Glencairn's goodness has introduced me to all the world. Not that I am in haste for the press. I have no idea of publishing, else I certainly had consulted my noble generous patron; but after acting the part of an honest man, and supporting my family, my whole wishes and views are directed to poetic pursuits. I am aware that though I were to give performances to the world superior to my former works, still if they were of the same kind with those, the comparative reception they would meet with would mortify me. I have turned my thoughts on the drama. I do not mean the stately buskin of the tragic muse.

Does not your ladyship think that an Edinburgh theatre would be more amused with affectation, folly and whim of true Scottish growth, than manners which by far the greatest part of the audience can only know at second hand?

I have the honour to be,
Your ladyship's ever devoted
And grateful humble servant,
R. B.

No. CCXXXV.

TO JOHN M'MURDO, ESQ.

DUMFRIES, *December*, 1793.

SIR,

IT is said that we take the greatest liberties with our greatest friends, and I pay myself a very high compliment in the manner in which I am going to apply the remark. I have owed you money longer than ever I owed it to any man.—Here is Ker's account, and here are six guineas; and now, I don't owe a shilling to man—or woman either. But for these damned dirty, dog's-ear'd little pages,* I had done myself the honour to have waited on you long ago. Independent of the obligations your hospitality has laid me under; the consciousness of your superiority in the rank of man and gentleman, of itself was fully as much as I could ever make head against; but to owe you money too, was more than I could face.

I think I once mentioned something of a collection of Scots songs I have for some years been making: I send you a perusal of what I have got together. I could not conveniently spare them above five or six days, and five or six glances of them will probably more than suffice you. A very few of them are my own. When you are tired of them, please leave them with Mr Clint, of the King's arms. There is not another copy of the collection in the world; and I should be sorry that any unfortunate negligence should deprive me of what has cost me a good deal of pains.

R. B.

* Scottish bank Notes.

No. CCXXXVI.

TO JOHN M'MURDO, ESQ. DRUMLANRIG.

DUMFRIES, 1793.

WILL Mr M'Murdo do me the favour to accept of these volumes; a trifling but sincere mark of the very high respect I bear for his worth as a man, his manners as a gentleman, and his kindness as a friend. However inferior now, or afterwards, I may rank as a poet, one honest virtue to which few poets can pretend, I trust I shall ever claim as mine:—to no man, whatever his station in life, or his power to serve me, have I ever paid a compliment at the expence of TRUTH.

THE AUTHOR.*

No. CCXXXVII.

TO CAPTAIN ———.

DUMFRIES, *5th December*, 1793.

SIR,

HEATED as I was with wine yesternight, I was perhaps rather seemingly impertinent in my anxious wish to be honoured with your acquaintance. You will forgive it: it was the impulse of heart-felt respect. "He is the father of the Scottish county reform, and is a man who does honour to the business at the same time that the business does honour to him," said my worthy friend Glenriddel to somebody by me who was talking of your coming to this country with your corps. "Then," I said, "I have a woman's

* "These words," says Mr Cunningham, "are written on the blank leaf of the poet's works, published in two small volumes in 1793: the book is before me: the handwriting is bold and free —the pen seems to have been conscious that it was making a declaration of independence."

longing to take him by the hand, and say to him, 'Sir, I honour you as a man to whom the interests of humanity are dear, and as a patriot to whom the rights of your country are sacred.'"

In times like these, Sir, when our commoners are barely able by the glimmering of their own twilight understandings to scrawl a frank, and when lords are what gentlemen would be ashamed to be, to whom shall a sinking country call for help? To the independent country gentleman. To him who has too deep a stake in his country not to be in earnest for her welfare; and who in the honest pride of man can view with equal contempt the insolence of office and the allurements of corruption.

I mentioned to you a Scots ode or song I had lately composed, and which I think has some merit. Allow me to inclose it. When I fall in with you at the theatre, I shall be glad to have your opinion of it. Accept of it, Sir, as a very humble but most sincere tribute of respect from a man who, dear as he prizes poetic fame, yet holds dearer an independent mind. I have the honour to be,

R. B.*

* "The reader," says our friend Mr Robert Chambers, in his excellent Collection of Scottish Songs and Ballads, Vol. ii. p. 458., "will find Burns' own opinion of his favourite war song, in the following letter, which was written by him at Dumfries, on the 5th Dec., 1793., to a country gentleman of Perthshire, who was residing there in command of a party of Fencibles. I am indebted for this very interesting document to Mr Stewart, of Dalguise. It is perhaps one of the most characteristic letters Burns ever wrote."—M.

No. CCXXXVIII.

TO MRS RIDDEL,

Who was about to bespeak a Play one evening at the Dumfries Theatre.

I AM thinking to send my 'Address' to some periodical publication, but it has not got your sanction, so pray look over it.

As to the Tuesday's play, let me beg of you, my dear Madam, to give us, 'The Wonder, a Woman keeps a Secret!' to which please add, 'The Spoilt Child'—you will highly oblige me by so doing.

Ah, what an enviable creature you are! There now, this cursed gloomy blue-devil day, you are going to a party of choice spirits—

> "To play the shapes
> Of frolic fancy, and incessant form
> Those rapid pictures, assembled train
> Of fleet ideas, never join'd before,
> Where lively *wit* excites to gay surprise;
> Or folly-painting *humour*, grave himself,
> Calls laughter forth, deep shaking every nerve."

But as you rejoice with them that do rejoice, do also remember to weep with them that weep, and pity your melancholy friend,

R. B.*

* This lady, to whom the Bard has so happily and justly applied the above quotation, paid the debt of nature a few months ago. The graces of her person were only equalled by the singular endowments of her mind, and her poetical talents rendered her an interesting friend to Burns, in a part of the world where he was in a great measure excluded from the sweet intercourse of literary society.—*Currie.* Jan. 1809.

No. CCXXXIX.

TO A LADY,

IN FAVOUR OF A PLAYER'S BENEFIT.

DUMFRIES, 1794.

MADAM,

YOU were so very good as to promise me to honour my friend with your presence on his benefit night. That night is fixed for Friday first: the play a most interesting one! 'The Way to Keep Him.' I have the pleasure to know Mr G. well. His merit as an actor is generally acknowledged. He has genius and worth which would do honour to patronage: he is a poor and modest man; claims which from their very *silence* have the more forcible power on the generous heart. Alas, for pity! that from the indolence of those who have the good things of this life in their gift, too often does brazen-fronted importunity snatch that boon, the rightful due of retiring, humble want! Of all the qualities we assign to the author and director of Nature, by far the most enviable is—to be able "To wipe away all tears from all eyes." O what insignificant, sordid wretches are they, however chance may have loaded them with wealth, who go to their graves, to their magnificient *mausoleums*, with hardly the consciousness of having made one poor honest heart happy.

But I crave your pardon, Madam; I came to beg, not to preach.

R. B.

No. CCXL.

TO THE EARL OF BUCHAN,

With a Copy of Bruce's Address to his Troops at Bannockburn.

DUMFRIES, 12*th January*, 1794.

MY LORD,

WILL your lordship allow me to present you with the inclosed little composition of mine, as a small tribute of gratitude for the acquaintance with which you have been pleased to honour me. Independent of my enthusiasm as a Scotsman, I have rarely met with any thing in history which interests my feelings as a man, equal with the story of Bannockburn. On the one hand, a cruel, but able usurper, leading on the finest army in Europe to extinguish the last spark of freedom among a greatly-daring and greatly-injured people; on the other hand, the desperate relics of a gallant nation, devoting themselves to rescue their bleeding country, or perish with her.

Liberty! thou art a prize truly, and indeed invaluable! for never canst thou be too dearly bought!

If my little ode has the honour of your lordship's approbation, it will gratify my highest ambition.

I have the honour to be, &c.

R. B.

No. CCXLI.

TO CAPTAIN MILLER, DALSWINTON.

DEAR SIR,

THE following ode is on a subject which I know you by no means regard with indifference. Oh, Liberty,

"Thou mak'st the gloomy face of nature gay,
Giv'st beauty to the sun, and pleasure to the day."

It does me much good to meet with a man whose honest bosom glows with the generous enthusiasm, the heroic daring of liberty, that I could not forbear sending you a composition of my own on the subject, which I really think is in my best manner.

I have the honour to be,
Dear Sir, &c.

R. B.

No. CCXLII.

TO MRS RIDDEL.

DEAR MADAM,

I MEANT to have called on you yesternight, but as I edged up to your box-door, the first object which greeted my view, was one of those lobster-coated puppies, sitting like another dragon, guarding the Hesperian fruit. On the conditions and capitulations you so obligingly offer, I shall certainly make my weather-beaten rustic phiz a part of your box-furniture on Tuesday; when we may arrange the business of the visit.

Among the profusion of idle compliments, which insidious craft, or unmeaning folly, incessantly offer at your shrine—a shrine, how far exalted above such adoration—permit me, were it but for rarity's sake, to pay you the honest tribute of a warm heart and an independent mind; and to assure you, that I am, thou most amiable, and most accomplished of thy sex, with the most respectful esteem, and fervent regard, thine, &c.

R. B.

No. CCXLIII.

TO MRS RIDDEL.

I WILL wait on you, my ever valued friend, but whether in the morning I am not sure. Sunday closes a period of our curst revenue business, and may probably keep me employed with my pen until noon. Fine employment for a poet's pen! There is a species of the human genus that I call *the gin-horse class:* what enviable dogs they are! Round, and round, and round they go,—Mundell's ox, that drives his cotton mill, is their exact prototype—without an idea or wish beyond their circle; fat, sleek, stupid, patient, quiet, and contented; while here I sit, altogether Novemberish, a damned melange of fretfulness and melancholy; not enough of the one to rouse me to passion, nor of the other to repose me in torpor; my soul flouncing and fluttering round her tenement, like a wild finch, caught amid the horrors of winter, and newly thrust into a cage. Well, I am persuaded that it was of me the Hebrew sage prophesied, when he foretold—"And behold, on whatsoever this man doth set his heart, it shall not prosper!" If my resentment is awaked, it is sure to be where it dare not squeak; and if— * * * * *

Pray that wisdom and bliss be more frequent visitors of

R. B.

No. CCXLIV.

TO MRS RIDDEL.

I HAVE this moment got the song from Syme, and I am sorry to see that he has spoilt it a good deal. It shall be a lesson to me how I lend him any thing again.

I have sent you 'Werter,' truly happy to have any the smallest opportunity of obliging you.

'Tis true, Madam, I saw you once since I was at Woodlea; and that once froze the very life-blood of my heart. Your reception of me was such, that a wretch meeting the eye of his judge, about to pronounce sentence of death on him, could only have envied my feelings and situation. But I hate the theme, and never more shall write or speak on it.

One thing I shall proudly say, that I can pay Mrs R. a higher tribute of esteem, and appreciate her amiable worth more truly, than any man whom I have seen approach her.

R. B.

No. CCXLV

TO MRS RIDDEL.

I HAVE often told you, my dear friend, that you had a spice of caprice in your composition, and you have as often disavowed it; even perhaps while your opinions were, at the moment, irrefragably proving it. Could *any thing* estrange me from a friend such as you?—No! To-morrow I shall have the honour of waiting on you.

Farewell, thou first of friends, and most accomplished of women! even with all thy little caprices!

R. B.

No. CCXLVI.

TO MRS RIDDEL.

MADAM,

I RETURN your common-place book. I have perused it with much pleasure, and would have continued my criticisms, but as it seems the critic has forfeited your esteem, his strictures must lose their value.

If it is true that "offences come only from the heart," before you I am guiltless. To admire, esteem, and prize you, as the most accomplished of women, and the first of friends—if these are crimes, I am the most offending thing alive.

In a face where I used to meet the kind complacency of friendly confidence, *now* to find cold neglect, and contemptuous scorn—is a wrench that my heart can ill bear. It is, however, some kind of miserable good luck, that while *de haut-en-bas* rigour may depress an unoffending wretch to the ground, it has a tendency to rouse a stubborn something in his bosom, which, though it cannot heal the wounds of his soul, is at least an opiate to blunt their poignancy.

With the profoundest respect for your abilities; the most sincere esteem, and ardent regard, for your gentle heart and amiable manners; and the most fervent wish and prayer for your welfare, peace, and bliss, I have the honour to be, Madam, your most devoted humble servant,

R. B

No. CCXLVII.

TO JOHN SYME, ESQ.

You know that among other high dignities, you have the honour to be my supreme court of critical judicature, from which there is no appeal. I inclose you a song which I composed since I saw you, and I am going to give you the history of it. Do you know that among much that I admire in the characters and manners of those great folks whom I have now the honour to call my acquaintances, the Oswald family, there is nothing charms me more than Mr Oswald's unconcealable attachment to that incomparable woman. Did you ever, my dear Syme, meet with a man who owed more to the Divine Giver of all good things than

Mr O.? A fine fortune; a pleasing exterior; self-evident amiable dispositions, and an ingenuous upright mind, and that informed too, much beyond the usual run of young fellows of his rank and fortune: and to all this, such a woman!—but of her I shall say nothing at all, in despair of saying any thing adequate: in my song, I have endeavoured to do justice to what would be his feelings, on seeing in the scene I have drawn, the habitation of his Lucy. As I am a good deal pleased with my performance, I in my first fervour thought of sending it to Mrs Oswald, but on second thoughts, perhaps what I offer as the honest incense of genuine respect, might, from the well-known character of poverty and poetry, be construed into some modification or other of that servility which my soul abhors.

R. B.*

* "The song inclosed was that fine one beginning,

'O wat ye wha's in yon town,'

The oral communications of the poet with his friend John Syme were numerous: not so his communications with the pen: they were for some years near neighbours, and intercourse by letter was unnecessary. In one of Cunningham's letters he says to Burns, 'I lately received a letter from our friend Barncallie—what a charming fellow lost to society—born to great expectations—with superior abilities, a pure heart and untainted morals; his fate in life has been hard indeed.' It was the fate of Syme to lose the estate of Barncallie in Galloway, which passed from the family at his father's death. Of his talents something has already been said: he was one of the most agreeable men in company that ever did honour to a toast—he was celebrated too for his wit, his wine, and his dinners; some of his epigrams were imputed to Burns. His wife, a very handsome woman, was a most affectionate mother—her chief pleasure lay in seeing her children healthy and her husband happy."—*Cunningham.*

No. CCXLVIII.

TO MISS ——.

DUMFRIES, 1794.

MADAM,

NOTHING short of a kind of absolute necessity could have made me trouble you with this letter. Except my ardent and just esteem for your sense, taste, and worth, every sentiment arising in my breast, as I put pen to paper to you, is painful. The scenes I have passed with the friend of my soul and his amiable connexions! the wrench at my heart to think that he is gone, for ever gone from me, never more to meet in the wanderings of a weary world! and the cutting reflection of all, that I had most unfortunately, though most undeservedly, lost the confidence of that soul of worth, ere it took its flight!

These, Madam, are sensations of no ordinary anguish.—However, you also may be offended with some *imputed* improprieties of mine; sensibility you know I possess, and sincerity none will deny me.

To oppose those prejudices which have been raised against me, is not the business of this letter. Indeed it is a warfare I know not how to wage. The powers of positive vice I can in some degree calculate, and against direct malevolence I can be on my guard; but who can estimate the fatuity of giddy caprice, or ward off the unthinking mischief of precipitate folly?

I have a favour to request of you, Madam; and of your sister Mrs ——, through your means. You know that, at the wish of my late friend, I made a collection of all my trifles in verse which I had ever written. They are many of them local, some of them puerile and silly, and all of them unfit for the public eye. As I have some little fame at stake, a fame that I trust may live when the hate of those who "watch for my halting," and the contumelious sneer

of those whom accident has made my superiors, will, with themselves, be gone to the regions of oblivion; I am uneasy now for the fate of those manuscripts—Will Mrs —— have the goodness to destroy them, or return them to me? As a pledge of friendship they were bestowed; and that circumstance indeed was all their merit. Most unhappily for me, that merit they no longer possess; and I hope that Mrs ——'s goodness, which I well know, and ever will revere, will not refuse this favour to a man whom she once held in some degree of estimation.

With the sincerest esteem, I have the honour to be, Madam, &c.

R. B.

No. CCXLIX.

TO MR CUNNINGHAM.

25th February, 1794.

Canst thou minister to a mind diseased? Canst thou speak peace and rest to a soul tost on a sea of troubles, without one friendly star to guide her course, and dreading that the next surge may overwhelm her? Canst thou give to a frame, tremblingly alive as the tortures of suspense, the stability and hardihood of the rock that braves the blast? If thou canst not do the least of these, why wouldst thou disturb me in my miseries, with thy inquiries after me?

For these two months I have not been able to lift a pen. My constitution and frame were, *ab origine*, blasted with a deep incurable taint of hypochondria, which poisons my existence. Of late a number of domestic vexations, and some pecuniary share in the ruin of these cursed times; losses which, though trifling, were yet what I could ill bear, have so irritated me, that my feelings at times could only be envied by a reprobate spirit listening to the sentence that dooms it to perdition.

Are you deep in the language of consolation? I have exhausted in reflection every topic of comfort. *A heart at ease* would have been charmed with my sentiments and reasonings; but as to myself, I was like Judas Iscariot preaching the gospel; he might melt and mould the hearts of those around him, but his own kept its native incorrigibility.

Still there are two great pillars that bear us up, amid the wreck of misfortune and misery. The ONE is composed of the different modifications of a certain noble, stubborn something in man, known by the names of courage, fortitude, magnanimity. The OTHER is made up of those feelings and sentiments, which, however the sceptic may deny them, or the enthusiast disfigure them, are yet, I am convinced, original and component parts of the human soul; those *senses of the mind*, if I may be allowed the expression, which connect us with, and link us to, those awful obscure realities—an all-powerful, and equally beneficent God; and a world to come, beyond death and the grave. The first gives the nerve of combat, while a ray of hope beams on the field: the last pours the balm of comfort into the wounds which time can never cure.

I do not remember, my dear Cunningham, that you and I ever talked on the subject of religion at all. I know some who laugh at it, as the trick of the crafty FEW, to lead the undiscerning MANY; or at most as an uncertain obscurity, which mankind can never know any thing of, and with which they are fools if they give themselves much to do. Nor would I quarrel with a man for his irreligion, any more than I would for his want of a musical ear. I would regret that he was shut out from what, to me and to others, were such superlative sources of enjoyment. It is in this point of view, and for this reason, that I will deeply imbue the mind of every child of mine with religion. If my son should happen to be a man of feeling, sentiment and taste, I shall thus add largely to his enjoyments. Let me flatter myself that this sweet little fellow, who is just now running

about my desk, will be a man of a melting, ardent, glowing heart; and an imagination, delighted with the painter, and rapt with the poet. Let me figure him wandering out in a sweet evening, to inhale the balmy gales, and enjoy the growing luxuriance of the spring; himself the while in the blooming youth of life. He looks abroad on all nature, and through nature up to nature's God. His soul, by swift delighting degrees, is rapt above this sublunary sphere until he can be silent no longer, and bursts out into the glorious enthusiasm of Thomson,

> "These, as they change, Almighty Father, these
> Are but the varied God.—The rolling year
> Is full of thee."

And so on in all the spirit and ardour of that charming hymn. These are no ideal pleasures, they are real delights; and I ask, what of the delights among the sons of men are superior, not to say equal to them? And they have this precious, vast addition, that conscious virtue stamps them for her own; and lays hold on them to bring herself into the presence of a witnessing, judging, and approving God.

R. B.

No. CCL.

TO THE EARL OF GLENCAIRN.

May, 1794.

My Lord,

When you cast your eye on the name at the bottom of this letter, and on the title-page of the book I do myself the honour to send your lordship, a more pleasurable feeling than my vanity tells me, that it must be a name not entirely unknown to you. The generous patronage of your late illustrious brother found me in the lowest obscurity: he introduced my rustic muse to the partiality of my country; and to him I owe all. My sense of his goodness, and

the anguish of my soul at losing my truly noble protector and friend, I have endeavoured to express in a poem to his memory, which I have now published. This edition is just from the press; and in my gratitude to the dead, and my respect for the living (fame belies you, my lord, if you possess not the same dignity of man, which was your noble brother's characteristic feature), I had destined a copy for the Earl of Glencairn. I learnt just now that you are in town:—allow me to present it you.

I know, my lord, such is the vile, venal contagion which pervades the world of letters, that professions of respect from an author, particularly from a poet to a lord, are more than suspicious. I claim my by-past conduct, and my feelings at this moment, as exceptions to the too just conclusion. Exalted as are the honours of your lordship's name, and unnoted as is the obscurity of mine; with the uprightness of an honest man, I come before your lordship, with an offering, however humble, 'tis all I have to give, of my grateful respect; and to beg of you, my lord,—'tis all I have to ask of you, that you will do me the honour to accept of it.

I have the honour to be, R. B.*

No. CCLI.

TO DR ANDERSON.

SIR,

I AM much indebted to my worthy friend Dr Blacklock for introducing me to a gentleman of Dr Anderson's celebrity; but when you do me the honour to ask my assistance in your proposed publication, alas, Sir! you might as well

* The original letter is in the possession of the Honourable Mrs Holland, of Poynings. From a memorandum on the back, it appears to have been written in May, 1794.—*Cromek.*

think to cheapen a little honesty at the sign of an Advocate's wig, or humility under the Geneva band. I am a miserable hurried devil, worn to the marrow in the friction of holding the noses of the poor publicans to the grindstone of the Excise! and like Milton's Satan, for private reasons, am forced

"To do what yet tho' damn'd I would abhor."

—and except a couplet or two of honest execration * * * * * * * * * * R. B.

No. CCLII.

TO DAVID MACCULLOCH, ESQ.

DUMFRIES, 21*st June*, 1794.

MY DEAR SIR,

MY long projected journey through your country is at last fixed: and on Wednesday next, if you have nothing of more importance to do, take a saunter down to Gatehouse about two or three o'clock, I shall be happy to take a draught of M'Kune's best with you. Collector Syme will be at Glens about that time, and will meet us about dish-of-tea hour. Syme goes also to Kerroughtree, and let me remind you of your kind promise to accompany me there; I will need all the friends I can muster, for I am indeed ill at ease whenever I approach your honourables and right honourables.

Yours sincerely, R. B.

No. CCLIII.

TO MRS DUNLOP.

CASTLE DOUGLAS, 25*th June*, 1794.

HERE in a solitary inn, in a solitary village, am I set by myself, to amuse my brooding fancy as I may.—Solitary

confinement, you know, is Howard's favourite idea of reclaiming sinners; so let me consider by what fatality it happens that I have so long been exceeding sinful as to neglect the correspondence of the most valued friend I have on earth. To tell you that I have been in poor health will not be excuse enough, though it is true. I am afraid that I am about to suffer for the follies of my youth. My medical friends threaten me with a flying gout; but I trust they are mistaken.

I am just going to trouble your critical patience with the first sketch of a stanza I have been framing as I passed along the road. The subject is Liberty: you know, my honoured friend, how dear the theme is to me. I design it an irregular ode for General Washington's birth-day. After having mentioned the degeneracy of other kingdoms I come to Scotland thus:

"Thee, Caledonia, thy wild heaths among,
Thee, famed for martial deed and sacred song,
To thee I turn with swimming eyes;
Where is that soul of freedom fled?
Immingled with the mighty dead!
Beneath the hallowed turf where Wallace lies,
Hear it not, Wallace, in thy bed of death,
Ye babbling winds in silence sweep,
Disturb ye not the hero's sleep."

[*Vol.* i. *page* 331.]

with the additions of

"That arm which nerved with thundering fate,
Braved usurpation's boldest daring!
One quenched in darkness like the sinking star,
And one the palsied arm of tottering, powerless age."

You will probably have another scrawl from me in a stage or two. R. B.

No. CCLIV.

TO MR JAMES JOHNSON.

DUMFRIES, 1794.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

You should have heard from me long ago; but over and above some vexatious share in the pecuniary losses of these accursed times, I have all this winter been plagued with low spirits and blue devils, so that *I have almost hung my harp on the willow trees.*

I am just now busy correcting a new edition of my poems, and this with my ordinary business, finds me in full employment.

I send you by my friend, Mr Wallace, forty-one songs for your fifth volume; if we cannot finish it any other way, what would you think of Scots words to some beautiful Irish airs? In the mean time, at your leisure, give a copy of the Museum to my worthy friend, Mr Peter Hill, Bookseller, to bind for me, interleaved with blank leaves, exactly as he did the Laird of Glenriddel's, that I may insert every anecdote I can learn, together with my own criticisms and remarks on the songs. A copy of this kind I shall leave with you, the editor, to publish at some after period, by way of making the Museum a book famous to the end of time, and you renowned for ever.

I have got a Highland dirk, for which I have great veneration; as it once was the dirk of *Lord Balmerino.* It fell into bad hands, who stripped it of the silver mounting, as well as the knife and fork. I have some thoughts of sending it to your care, to get it mounted anew.

Thank you for the copies of my Volunteer Ballad.—Our friend Clarke has done *indeed* well! 'tis chaste and beautiful. I have not met with any thing that has pleased me so much. You know I am no connoisseur: but that I am an amateur—will be allowed me. R. B.*

* Burns' anxiety with regard to the correctness of his writ-

No. CCLV.

TO MR SAMUEL CLARKE, JUN. DUMFRIES.

Sunday Morning.

DEAR SIR,

I WAS, I know, drunk last night, but I am sober this morning. From the expressions Capt. ——— made use of to me, had I had nobody's welfare to care for but my own, we should certainly have come, according to the manners of the world, to the necessity of murdering one another about the business. The words were such as, generally, I believe, end in a brace of pistols; but I am still pleased to think that I did not ruin the peace and welfare of a wife and a family of children in a drunken squabble. Farther you know that the report of certain political opinions being mine, has already once before brought me to the brink of destruction. I dread lest last night's business may be misrepresented in the same way.—You, I beg, will take care to prevent it. I tax your wish for Mr Burns' welfare with the task of waiting as soon as possible, on every gentleman who was present, and state this to him, and, as you please, show him this letter. What, after all, was the obnoxious toast? "May our success in the present war be equal to the justice of our cause."—A toast that the most outrageous frenzy of loyalty cannot object to. I request and beg that this morning you will wait on the parties present at the foolish dispute. I shall only add, that I am truly sorry that a man who stood so high in my estimation as Mr ——, should use me in the manner in which I conceive he has done.

R. B.*

ings was very great. Being questioned as to his mode of composition, he replied, 'All my poetry is the effect of easy composition, but of *laborious correction*.'—*Cromek.*

* At this period of our poet's life, when political animosity was made the ground of private quarrel, the following foolish verses were sent as an attack on Burns and his friends for their political

No. CCLVI.

TO PETER MILLER, JUN. ESQ.*

OF DALSWINTON.

DUMFRIES, *Nov.* 1794.

DEAR SIR,

YOUR offer is indeed truly generous, and most sincerely do I thank you for it; but in my present situation, I find that I dare not accept it. You well know my political sentiments; and were I an insular individual, unconnected with a wife and a family of children, with the most fervid

opinions. They were written by some member of a club styling themselves the Loyal Natives of Dumfries, or rather by the united genius of that club, which was more distinguished for drunken loyalty, than either for respectability or poetical talent. The verses were handed over the table to Burns at a convivial meeting, and he instantly indorsed the subjoined reply.

THE LOYAL NATIVES' VERSES.

"Ye sons of sedition, give ear to my song,
Let Syme, BURNS, and Maxwell, pervade every throng,
With Craken the attorney, and Mundell the quack,
Send Willie the monger to hell with a smack."

BURNS—*Extempore.*

"Ye true 'Loyal Natives,' attend to my song,
In uproar and riot rejoice the night long;
From *envy* and hatred your corps is exempt;
But where is your shield from the *darts of contempt*?"

Cromek.

* In a conversation with his friend Mr Perry, (the proprietor of 'The Morning Chronicle,') Mr Miller represented to that gentleman the insufficiency of Burns' salary to answer the imperious demands of a numerous family. In their sympathy for his misfortunes, and in their regret that his talents were nearly lost to the world of letters, these gentlemen agreed on the plan of settling him in London. To accomplish this most desirable object, Mr Perry, very spiritedly, made the Poet a handsome offer of an annual stipend for the exercise of his talents in his newspaper. Burns' reasons for refusing this offer are stated in the present letter.—*Cromek.*

enthusiasm I would have volunteered my services: I then could and would have despised all consequences that might have ensued.

My prospect in the Excise is something; at least, it is, encumbered as I am with the welfare, the very existence, of near half-a-score of helpless individuals, what I dare not sport with.

In the mean time, they are most welcome to my Ode; only, let them insert it as a thing they have met with by accident and unknown to me.—Nay, if Mr Perry, whose honour, after your character of him I cannot doubt, if he will give me an address and channel by which any thing will come safe from those spies with which he may be certain that his correspondence is beset, I will now and then send him any bagatelle that I may write. In the present hurry of Europe, nothing but news and politics will be regarded; but against the days of peace, which Heaven send soon, my little assistance may perhaps fill up an idle column of a newspaper. I have long had it in my head to try my hand in the way of little prose essays, which I propose sending into the world through the medium of some newspaper; and should these be worth his while, to these Mr Perry shall be welcome; and all my reward shall be, his treating me with his paper, which, by the bye, to any body who has the least relish for wit, is a high treat indeed.

With the most grateful esteem, I am ever,

Dear Sir, R. B.

No. CCLVII.

TO MRS RIDDEL.

Supposes himself to be writing from the dead to the living.

MADAM,

I DARE say that this is the first epistle you ever received from this nether world. I write you from the regions of

Hell, amid the horrors of the damned. The time and manner of my leaving your earth I do not exactly know, as I took my departure in the heat of a fever of intoxication, contracted at your too hospitable mansion; but, on my arrival here, I was fairly tried, and sentenced to endure the purgatorial tortures of this infernal confine for the space of ninety-nine years, eleven months, and twenty-nine days, and all on account of the impropriety of my conduct yesternight under your roof. Here am I, laid on a bed of pitiless furze, with my aching head reclined on a pillow of ever-piercing thorn, while an infernal tormentor, wrinkled, and old, and cruel, his name I think is *Recollection*, with a whip of scorpions, forbids peace or rest to approach me, and keeps anguish eternally awake. Still, Madam, if I could in any measure be reinstated in the good opinion of the fair circle whom my conduct last night so much injured, I think it would be an alleviation to my torments. For this reason I trouble you with this letter. To the men of the company I will make no apology.—Your husband, who insisted on my drinking more than I chose, has no right to blame me; and the other gentlemen were partakers of my guilt. But to you, Madam, I have much to apologize. Your good opinion I valued as one of the greatest acquisitions I had made on earth, and I was truly a beast to forfeit it. There was a Miss I—— too, a woman of fine sense, gentle and unassuming manners—do make on my part, a miserable damned wretch's best apology to her. A Mrs G——, a charming woman, did me the honour to be prejudiced in my favour; this makes me hope that I have not outraged her beyond all forgiveness.—To all the other ladies please present my humblest contrition for my conduct, and my petition for their gracious pardon. O all ye powers of decency and decorum! whisper to them that my errors, though great, were involuntary—that an intoxicated man is the vilest of beasts—that it was not in my nature to be brutal to any one—that to be rude to a woman, when in my senses, was impossible with me—but—

* * * * *

Regret! Remorse! Shame! ye three hellhounds that ever dog my steps and bay at my heels, spare me! spare me!

Forgive the offences, and pity the perdition of, Madam, your humble slave, R. B.

No. CCLVIII.

TO MRS RIDDEL.

Mr Burns's compliments to Mrs Riddel—is much obliged to her for her polite attention in sending him the book. Owing to Mr B. being at present acting as supervisor of excise, a department that occupies his every hour of the day, he has not that time to spare which is necessary for any belle-lettre pursuit; but, as he will, in a week or two, again return to his wonted leisure, he will then pay that attention to Mrs R.'s beautiful song, "To thee, loved Nith" —which it so well deserves. When "Anacharsis' Travels" come to hand, which Mrs Riddel mentioned as her gift to the public library, Mr B. will feel honoured by the indulgence of a perusal of them before presentation: it is a book he has never yet seen, and the regulations of the library allow too little leisure for deliberate reading.

Friday Evening.

P. S. Mr Burns will be much obliged to Mrs Riddel if she will favour him with a perusal of any of her poetical pieces which he may not have seen.*

Dumfries—1795.

* "I am indebted," says Mr Cunningham, "to my friend Sir Andrew Halliday for this characteristic note. He is now in the West Indies, and will not likely see this edition of his favourite poet till all the volumes have issued from the press. When he opens it he will observe how much use I have made of the many interesting conversations with which he indulged me—his taste is

"And now your banks and bonnie braes
But waken sad remembrance' smart:
The very shades I held most dear
Now strike fresh anguish to my heart;
Deserted bower! where are they now?
Ah! where the garlands that I wove
With faithful care—each morn to deck
The altars of ungrateful love.

The flowers of spring, how gay they bloomed
When last with him I wandered here!
The flowers of spring are past away
For wintry horrors dark and drear.
Yon osier'd stream by whose lone banks
My songs have lulled him oft to rest
Is now in icy fetters locked—
Cold as my false love's frozen breast."

No. CCLIX.

TO MISS FONTENELLE.

DUMFRIES, 1795.

MADAM,

IN such a bad world as ours, those who add to the scanty sum of our pleasures, are positively our benefactors. To you, Madam, on our humble Dumfries boards, I have been more indebted for entertainment than ever I was in prouder theatres. Your charms as a woman would insure applause to the most indifferent actress, and your theatrical talents would insure admiration to the plainest figure. This, Madam, is not the unmeaning or insidious compliment of the frivolous or interested; I pay it from the same honest impulse that the sublime of nature excites my admiration, or her beauties give me delight.

as true as his heart is warm—and in all matters connected with the history and literature of Scotland, I have never found him at a loss. In the song of "To thee loved Nith," alluded to by the poet, there are some fine verses.

Will the foregoing lines* be of any service to you in your approaching benefit night? If they will I shall be prouder of my muse than ever. They are nearly extempore: I know they have no great merit; but though they should add but little to the entertainment of the evening, they give me the happiness of an opportunity to declare how much I have the honour to be, &c.

R. B.

No. CCLX.

TO MRS DUNLOP.

15th December, 1795.

My Dear Friend,

As I am in a complete Decemberish humour, gloomy, sullen, stupid, as even the Deity of Dulness herself could wish, I shall not drawl out a heavy letter with a number of heavier apologies for my late silence. Only one I shall mention, because I know you will sympathize in it: these four months, a sweet little girl, my youngest child, has been so ill, that every day, a week or less threatened to terminate her existence. There had much need be many pleasures annexed to the states of husband and father, for, God knows, they have many peculiar cares. I cannot describe to you the anxious, sleepless hours these ties frequently give me. I see a train of helpless little folks; me and my exertions all their stay: and on what a brittle thread does the life of man hang! If I am nipt off at the command of fate! even in all the vigour of manhood as I am—such things happen every day—Gracious God! what would become of my little flock! 'Tis here that I envy your people of fortune.—A father on his death-bed, taking an everlasting leave of his children, has indeed woe enough; but

* Vide vol. ii. page 32.

the man of competent fortune leaves his sons and daughters independency and friends; while I—but I shall run distracted if I think any longer on the subject!

To leave talking of the matter so gravely, I shall sing with the old Scots ballad—

"O that I had ne'er been married,
I would never had nae care;
Now I've gotten wife and bairns,
They cry crowdie evermair.

Crowdie ance; crowdie twice;
Crowdie three times in a day;
An ye crowdie ony mair,
Ye'll crowdie a' my meal away."—

December 24th.

We have had a brilliant theatre here this season; only, as all other business does, it experiences a stagnation of trade from the epidemical complaint of the country, *want of cash*. I mentioned our theatre merely to lug in an occasional Address which I wrote for the benefit-night of one of the actresses, and which is as follows—

ADDRESS,

SPOKEN BY MISS FONTENELLE ON HER BENEFIT-NIGHT, DEC. 4, 1795, AT THE THEATRE, DUMFRIES.

"Still anxious to secure your partial favour."

(*Vide vol.* ii. *p.* 32.)

25th, Christmas Morning.

This, my much-loved friend, is a morning of wishes; accept mine—so heaven hear me as they are sincere! that blessings may attend your steps, and affliction know you not! In the charming words of my favourite author, 'The Man of Feeling,' "May the Great Spirit bear up the weight of thy grey hairs, and blunt the arrow that brings them rest!"

Now that I talk of authors, how do you like Cowper? Is not the 'Task' a glorious poem? The religion of the 'Task,' bating a few scraps of Calvinistic divinity, is the

religion of God and Nature; the religion that exalts, that ennobles man. Were not you to send me your 'Zeluco,' in return for mine? Tell me how you like my marks and notes through the book. I would not give a farthing for a book, unless I were at liberty to blot it with my criticisms.

I have lately collected, for a friend's perusal, all my letters; I mean those which I first sketched, in a rough draught, and afterwards wrote out fair. On looking over some old musty papers, which, from time to time, I had parcelled by, as trash that were scarce worth preserving, and which yet at the same time I did not care to destroy; I discovered many of these rude sketches, and have written, and am writing them out, in a bound MS. for my friend's library. As I wrote always to you the rhapsody of the moment, I cannot find a single scroll to you, except one, about the commencement of our acquaintance. If there were any possible conveyance, I would send you a perusal of my book.

R. B.

No. CCLXI.

TO MR ALEXANDER FINDLATER,

SUPERVISOR OF EXCISE, DUMFRIES.

SIR,

INCLOSED are the two schemes. I would not have troubled you with the collector's one, but for suspicion lest it be not right. Mr Erskine promised me to make it right, if you will have the goodness to show him how. As I have no copy of the scheme for myself, and the alterations being very considerable from what it was formerly, I hope that I shall have access to this scheme I send you, when I come to face up my new books. *So much for schemes.*—And that no scheme to betray a FRIEND or mislead a STRANGER;

to seduce a YOUNG GIRL, or rob a HEN-ROOST; to subvert LIBERTY, or bribe an EXCISEMAN; to disturb the GENERAL ASSEMBLY, or annoy a GOSSIPPING; to overthrow the credit of ORTHODOXY, or the authority of OLD SONGS; to oppose *your wishes*, or frustrate *my hopes*—MAY PROSPER—is the sincere wish and prayer of

R. B.

No. CCLXII.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE MORNING CHRONICLE.

DUMFRIES, 1795.

SIR,

You will see by your subscribers' list, that I have been about nine months of that number.

I am sorry to inform you, that in that time, seven or eight of your papers either have never been sent me, or else have never reached me. To be deprived of any one number of the first newspaper in Great Britain for information, ability, and independence, is what I can ill brook and bear; but to be deprived of that most admirable oration of the Marquis of Lansdowne, when he made the great, though ineffectual attempt, (in the language of the poet, I fear too true,) "to save a SINKING STATE"—this was a loss that I neither can, nor will forgive you.—That paper, Sir, never reached me; but I demand it of you. I am a BRITON; and must be interested in the cause of LIBERTY:—I am a MAN; and the RIGHTS OF HUMAN NATURE cannot be indifferent to me. However, do not let me mislead you: I am not a man in that situation of life, which, as your subscriber, can be of any consequence to you, in the eyes of those to whom SITUATION OF LIFE ALONE is the criterion of MAN.—I am but a plain tradesman, in this distant, obscure country town: but that humble domicile in which I shelter

my wife and children, is the CASTELLUM of a BRITON; and that scanty, hard-earned income which supports them, is as truly my property, as the most magnificent fortune, of the most PUISSANT MEMBER of your HOUSE OF NOBLES.

These, Sir, are my sentiments; and to them I subscribe my name: and were I a man of ability and consequence enough to address the PUBLIC, with that name should they appear.

I am, &c.*

No. CCLXIII.

TO COLONEL W. DUNBAR.

I AM not gone to Elysium, most noble Colonel, but am still here in this sublunary world, serving my God by propagating his image, and honouring my king by begetting him loyal subjects. Many happy returns of the season await my friend! May the thorns of care never beset his path! May peace be an inmate of his bosom, and rapture a frequent visitor of his soul! May the bloodhounds of misfortune never trace his steps, nor the screech-owl of sor-

* "This letter owes its origin to the following circumstance. A neighbour of the Poet's at Dumfries, called on him and complained that he had been greatly disappointed in the irregular delivery of the Paper of *The Morning Chronicle*. Burns asked, 'Why do not you write to the Editors of the Paper?' 'Good God, Sir, can *I* presume to write to the learned Editors of a Newspaper?'—'Well, if *you* are afraid of writing to the Editors of a Newspaper, *I* am not; and if you think proper, I'll draw up a sketch of a letter which you may copy.'

"Burns tore a leaf from his excise book, and instantly produced the sketch which I have transcribed, and which is here printed. The poor man thanked him, and took the letter home. However, that caution which the watchfulness of his enemies had taught him to exercise, prompted him to the prudence of begging a friend to wait on the person for whom it was written, and request the favour to have it returned. This request was complied with, and the paper never appeared in print."—*Cromek.*

row alarm his dwelling! May enjoyment tell thy hours, and pleasure number thy days, thou friend of the Bard! Blessed be he that blesseth thee, and cursed be he that curseth thee!

No. CCLXIV.

TO MR HERON, OF HERON.

DUMFRIES, 1794, or 1795.

SIR,

I INCLOSE you some copies of a couple of political ballads; one of which, I believe, you have never seen. Would to Heaven I could make you master of as many votes in the Stewartry—but—

"Who does the utmost that he can,
Does well, acts nobly, angels could no more."

In order to bring my humble efforts to bear with more effect on the foe, I have privately printed a good many copies of both ballads, and have sent them among friends all about the country.

To pillory on Parnassus the rank reprobation of character, the utter dereliction of all principle, in a profligate junto which has not only outraged virtue, but violated common decency; which, spurning even hypocrisy as paltry iniquity below their daring;—to unmask their flagitiousness to the broadest day—to deliver such over to their merited fate, is surely not merely innocent, but laudable; is not only propriety, but virtue. You have already, as your auxiliary, the sober detestation of mankind on the heads of your opponents; and I swear by the lyre of Thalia to muster on your side all the votaries of honest laughter, and fair, candid ridicule!

I am extremely obliged to you for your kind mention of my interests in a letter which Mr Syme showed me. At present my situation in life must be in a great measure sta-

tionary, at least for two or three years. The statement is this—I am on the supervisors' list, and as we come on there by precedency, in two or three years I shall be at the head of that list, and be appointed *of course*. *Then*, a FRIEND might be of service to me in getting me into a place of the kingdom which I would like. A supervisor's income varies from about a hundred and twenty to two hundred a year; but the business is an incessant drudgery, and would be nearly a complete bar to every species of literary pursuit. The moment I am appointed supervisor, in the common routine, I may be nominated on the collector's list; and this is always a business purely of political patronage. A collectorship varies much, from better than two hundred a year to near a thousand. They also come forward by precedency on the list; and have, besides a handsome income, a life of complete leisure. A life of literary leisure with a decent competency, is the summit of my wishes. It would be the prudish affectation of silly pride in me to say that I do not need, or would not be indebted to a political friend; at the same time, Sir, I by no means lay my affairs before you thus, to hook my dependent situation on your benevolence. If, in my progress of life, an opening should occur where the good offices of a gentleman of your public character and political consequence might bring me forward, I shall petition your goodness with the same frankness as I now do myself the honour to subscribe myself,

R. B.

No. CCLXV.

TO MRS DUNLOP, IN LONDON.

DUMFRIES, 20*th December*, 1795.

I HAVE been prodigiously disappointed in this London journey of yours. In the first place, when your last to me reached Dumfries, I was in the country, and did not return

until too late to answer your letter; in the next place, I thought you would certainly take this route; and now I know not what is become of you, or whether this may reach you at all.—God grant that it may find you and yours in prospering health and good spirits! Do let me hear from you the soonest possible.

As I hope to get a frank from my friend Captain Miller, I shall, every leisure hour, take up the pen, and gossip away whatever comes first, prose or poetry, sermon or song. In this last article I have abounded of late. I have often mentioned to you a superb publication of Scottish songs, which is making its appearance in your great metropolis, and where I have the honour to preside over the Scottish verse, as no less a personage than Peter Pindar does over the English.

December 29th.

Since I began this letter, I have been appointed to act in the capacity of supervisor here, and I assure you, what with the load of business, and what with that business being new to me, I could scarcely have commanded ten minutes to have spoken to you, had you been in town, much less to have written you an epistle. This appointment is only temporary, and during the illness of the present incumbent; but I look forward to an early period when I shall be appointed in full form: a consummation devoutly to be wished! My political sins seem to be forgiven me.

This is the season (New-year's-day is now my date) of wishing; and mine are most fervently offered up for you! May life to you be a positive blessing while it lasts, for your own sake; and that it may yet be greatly prolonged, is my wish for my own sake, and for the sake of the rest of your friends! What a transient business is life! Very lately I was a boy; but t'other day I was a young man; and I already begin to feel the rigid fibre and stiffening joints of old age coming fast o'er my frame. With all my follies of youth, and I fear, a few vices of manhood, still I

congratulate myself on having had in early days religion strongly impressed on my mind. I have nothing to say to any one as to which sect he belongs to, or what creed he believes: but I look on the man, who is firmly persuaded of infinite Wisdom and Goodness, superintending and directing every circumstance that can happen in his lot—I felicitate such a man as having a solid foundation for his mental enjoyment; a firm prop and sure stay, in the hour of difficulty, trouble, and distress; and a never-failing anchor of hope, when he looks beyond the grave.

January 12*th.*

You will have seen our worthy and ingenious friend, the Doctor, long ere this. I hope he is well, and beg to be remembered to him. I have just been reading over again, I dare say for the hundred and fiftieth time, his *View of Society and Manners*; and still I read it with delight. His humour is perfectly original—it is neither the humour of Addison, nor Swift, nor Sterne, nor of any body but Dr Moore. By the bye, you have deprived me of *Zeluco*, remember that, when you are disposed to rake up the sins of my neglect from among the ashes of my laziness.

He has paid me a pretty compliment, by quoting me in his last publication.* R. B.

No. CCLXVI.

Address of the Scotch Distillers

to

THE RIGHT HON. WILLIAM PITT.

Sir,

While pursy burgesses crowd your gate, sweating under the weight of heavy addresses, permit us, the quondam dis-

* Edward.

tillers in that part of Great Britain called Scotland, to approach you, not with venal approbation, but with fraternal condolence; not as what you are just now, or for some time have been; but as what, in all probability, you will shortly be.—We shall have the merit of not deserting our friends in the day of their calamity, and you will have the satisfaction of perusing at least one honest address. You are well acquainted with the dissection of human nature; nor do you need the assistance of a fellow-creature's bosom to inform you, that man is always a selfish, often a perfidious being. This assertion, however the hasty conclusions of superficial observation may doubt of it, or the raw inexperience of youth may deny it, those who make the fatal experiment we have done, will feel.—You are a statesman, and consequently are not ignorant of the traffic of these corporation compliments.—The little great man who drives the borough to market, and the very great man who buys the borough in that market, they two do the whole business; and you well know, they, likewise, have their price. With that sullen disdain which you can so well assume, rise, illustrious Sir, and spurn these hireling efforts of venal stupidity. At best they are the compliments of a man's friends on the morning of his execution: they take a decent farewell; resign you to your fate; and hurry away from your approaching hour.

If fame say true, and omens be not very much mistaken, you are about to make your exit from that world where the sun of gladness gilds the paths of prosperous men: permit us, great Sir, with the sympathy of fellow-feeling to hail your passage to the realms of ruin.

Whether the sentiment proceed from the selfishness or cowardice of mankind is immaterial; but to point out to a child of misfortune those who are still more unhappy, is to give him some degree of positive enjoyment. In this light, Sir, our downfall may be again useful to you:—Though not exactly in the same way, it is not perhaps the first time it has gratified your feelings. It is true, the triumph of your

evil star is exceedingly despiteful—At an age when others are the votaries of pleasure, or underlings in business, you had attained the highest wish of a British statesman; and with the ordinary date of human life, what a prospect was before you! Deeply rooted in *Royal Favour*, you overshadowed the land. The birds of passage, which follow ministerial sunshine through every clime of political faith and manners, flocked to your branches; and the beasts of the field (the lordly possessors of hills and valleys,) crowded under your shade. "But behold a watcher, a holy one, came down from heaven, and cried aloud, and said thus: Hew down the tree, and cut off his branches; shake off his leaves, and scatter his fruit; let the beasts get away from under it, and the fowls from his branches!" A blow from an unthought-of quarter, one of those terrible accidents which peculiarly mark the hand of Omnipotence, overset your career, and laid all your fancied honours in the dust. But turn your eyes, Sir, to the tragic scenes of our fate.—An ancient nation that for many ages had gallantly maintained the unequal struggle for independence with her much more powerful neighbour, at last agrees to a union which should ever after make them one people. In consideration of certain circumstances, it was covenanted that the former should enjoy a stipulated alleviation in her share of the public burdens, particularly in that branch of the revenue called the Excise. This just privilege has of late given great umbrage to some interested, powerful individuals of the more potent part of the empire, and they have spared no wicked pains, under insidious pretexts, to subvert what they dared not openly to attack, from the dread which they yet entertained of the spirit of their ancient enemies.

In this conspiracy we fell; nor did we alone suffer, our country was deeply wounded. A number of (we will say) respectable individuals, largely engaged in trade, where we were not only useful but absolutely necessary to our country in her dearest interests; we, with all that was near and dear to us, were sacrificed without remorse, to the infernal

deity of political expediency! We fell to gratify the wishes of dark envy, and the views of unprincipled ambition! Your foes, Sir, were avowed; were too brave to take an ungenerous advantage; *you* fell in the face of day.—On the contrary, our enemies, to complete our overthrow, contrived to make their guilt appear the villany of a nation.—Your downfall only drags with you your private friends and partisans: in our misery are more or less involved the most numerous and most valuable part of the community—all those who immediately depend on the cultivation of the soil, from the landlord of a province, down to his lowest hind.

Allow us, Sir, yet farther, just to hint at another rich vein of comfort in the dreary regions of adversity;—the gratulations of an approving conscience. In a certain great assembly, of which you are a distinguished member, panegyrics on your private virtues have so often wounded your delicacy, that we shall not distress you with any thing on the subject. There is, however, one part of your public conduct which our feelings will not permit us to pass in silence; our gratitude must trespass on your modesty; we mean, worthy Sir, your whole behaviour to the Scots Distillers.—In evil hours, when obtrusive recollection presses bitterly on the sense, let that, Sir, come like an healing angel, and speak the peace to your soul which the world can neither give nor take away.

We have the honour to be,
Sir,
Your sympathizing fellow-sufferers,
And grateful humble Servants,
JOHN BARLEYCORN—Præses.

No. CCLXVII.

TO THE

HON. THE PROVOST, BAILIES, AND TOWN COUNCIL OF DUMFRIES.

GENTLEMEN,

THE literary taste and liberal spirit of your good town has so ably filled the various departments of your schools, as to make it a very great object for a parent to have his children educated in them. Still, to me, a stranger, with my large family, and very stinted income, to give my young ones that education I wish, at the high-school fees which a stranger pays, will bear hard upon me.

Some years ago your good town did me the honour of making me an honorary Burgess.—Will you allow me to request that this mark of distinction may extend so far, as to put me on a footing of a real freeman of the town, in the schools?

If you are so very kind as to grant my request, it will certainly be a constant incentive to me to strain every nerve where I can officially serve you; and will, if possible, increase that grateful respect with which I have the honour to be,

Gentlemen,
Your devoted humble Servant,
R. B.*

* With the Poet's request the Magistrates of Dumfries very handsomely complied.—M.

No. CCLXVIII.

TO MRS RIDDEL.

DUMFRIES, *20th January*, 1796.

I CANNOT express my gratitude to you for allowing me a longer perusal of 'Anacharsis.' In fact, I never met with a book that bewitched me so much; and I, as a member of the library, must warmly feel the obligation you have laid us under. Indeed to me, the obligation is stronger than to any other individual of our society; as 'Anacharsis' is an indispensable desideratum to a son of the muses.

The health you wished me in your morning's card, is, I think, flown from me for ever. I have not been able to leave my bed to-day till about an hour ago. These wickedly unlucky advertisements I lent (I did wrong) to a friend, and I am ill able to go in quest of him.

The muses have not quite forsaken me. The following detached stanzas I intend to interweave in some disastrous tale of a shepherd.

R. B.

No. CCLXIX.

TO MRS DUNLOP.

DUMFRIES, *31st January*, 1796.

THESE many months you have been two packets in my debt—what sin of ignorance I have committed against so highly valued a friend I am utterly at a loss to guess. Alas! Madam, ill can I afford, at this time, to be deprived of any of the small remnant of my pleasures. I have lately drunk deep of the cup of affliction. The autumn robbed me of my only daughter and darling child, and that at a distance too, and so rapidly, as to put it out of my power

to pay the last duties to her. I had scarcely begun to recover from that shock, when I became myself the victim of a most severe rheumatic fever, and long the die spun doubtful; until after many weeks of a sick bed, it seems to have turned up life, and I am beginning to crawl across my room, and once indeed have been before my own door in the street.

"When pleasure fascinates the mental sight,
Affliction purifies the visual ray,
Religion hails the drear, the untried night,
And shuts, for ever shuts! life's doubtful day."

R. B.

No. CCLXX.

TO MRS RIDDEL,

Who had desired him to go to the Birth-Day Assembly on that day to show his loyalty.

DUMFRIES, *4th June*, 1796.

I AM in such miserable health as to be utterly incapable of showing my loyalty in any way. Rackt as I am with rheumatisms, I meet every face with a greeting, like that of Balak to Balaam—"Come curse me Jacob; and come defy me Israel!" So say I—Come curse me that east wind; and come, defy me the north! Would you have me in such circumstances copy you out a love-song?

I may perhaps see you on Saturday, but I will not be at the ball.—Why should I? "man delights not me, nor woman either!" Can you supply me with the song, "Let us all be unhappy together"—do if you can, and oblige *le pauvre miserable.*

R. B.

No. CCLXXI

TO MR JAMES JOHNSON, EDINBURGH.

DUMFRIES, *4th July*, 1796.

How are you, my dear friend, and how comes on your fifth volume? You may probably think that for some time past I have neglected you and your work; but, alas! the hand of pain, and sorrow, and care, has these many months lain heavy on me! Personal and domestic affliction have almost entirely banished that alacrity and life with which I used to woo the rural muse of Scotia.

You are a good, worthy, honest fellow, and have a good right to live in this world—because you deserve it. Many a merry meeting this publication has given us, and possibly it may give us more, though, alas! I fear it. This protracting, slow, consuming illness which hangs over me, will, I doubt much, my ever dear friend, arrest my sun before he has well reached his middle career, and will turn over the poet to far more important concerns than studying the brilliancy of wit, or the pathos of sentiment! However, *hope* is the cordial of the human heart, and I endeavour to cherish it as well as I can.

Let me hear from you as soon as convenient.—Your work is a great one; and now that it is finished, I see, if we were to begin again, two or three things that might be mended; yet I will venture to prophesy, that to future ages your publication will be the text-book and standard of Scottish song and music.

I am ashamed to ask another favour of you, because you have been so very good already; but my wife has a very particular friend of hers, a young lady who sings well, to whom she wishes to present the 'Scots Musical Museum.'

If you have a spare copy, will you be so obliging as to send it by the very first *fly*, as I am anxious to have it soon.

Yours ever, R. B.*

No. CCLXXII.

TO MR CUNNINGHAM.

BROW, *Sea-bathing quarters, 7th July*, 1796.

MY DEAR CUNNINGHAM,

I RECEIVED yours here this moment, and am indeed highly flattered with the approbation of the literary circle you mention; a literary circle inferior to none in the two kingdoms. Alas! my friend, I fear the voice of the bard will soon be heard among you no more! For these eight or ten months I have been ailing, sometimes bedfast and sometimes not; but these last three months I have been tortured with an excruciating rheumatism, which has reduced me to nearly the last stage. You actually would not know me if you saw me.—Pale, emaciated, and so feeble, as occasionally to need help from my chair—my spirits fled! fled!—but I can no more on the subject—only the medical folks tell me that my last and only chance is bathing and country quarters, and riding.—The deuce of the matter is this; when an exciseman is off duty, his salary is reduced to 35*l.* instead of 50*l.*—What way, in the name of thrift, shall I maintain myself, and keep a horse in country quarters—with a wife and five children at home, on 35*l.*? I mention this, because I had intended to beg your utmost interest, and that of all the friends you can muster, to move our commissioners of Excise to grant me the full salary; I

* "In this humble and delicate manner did poor Burns ask for a copy of a work of which he was principally the founder, and to which he had contributed, *gratuitously*, not less than 184 *original, altered, and collected songs!* The editor has seen 180 transcribed by his own hand for the 'Museum.'"—*Cromek.*

dare say you know them all personally. If they do not grant it me, I must lay my account with an exit truly *en poëte*, if I die not of disease, I must perish with hunger.

I have sent you one of the songs; the other my memory does not serve me with, and I have no copy here; but I shall be at home soon, when I will send it you.—Apropos to being at home, Mrs Burns threatens in a week or two, to add one more to my paternal charge, which, if of the right gender, I intend shall be introduced to the world by the respectable designation of *Alexander Cunningham Burns*. My last was *James Glencairn*, so you can have no objection to the company of nobility. Farewell.

R. B.

No. CCLXXIII.

TO MR GILBERT BURNS.

10th July, 1796.

Dear Brother,

It will be no very pleasing news to you to be told that I am dangerously ill, and not likely to get better. An inveterate rheumatism has reduced me to such a state of debility, and my appetite is so totally gone, that I can scarcely stand on my legs. I have been a week at sea-bathing, and I will continue there, or in a friend's house in the country, all the summer. God keep my wife and children: if I am taken from their head, they will be poor indeed. I have contracted one or two serious debts, partly from my illness these many months, partly from too much thoughtlessness as to expense when I came to town, that will cut in too much on the little I leave them in your hands. Remember me to my mother.

Yours, R. B.

No. CCLXXIV.

TO MRS BURNS.

BROW, *Thursday.*

MY DEAREST LOVE,

I DELAYED writing until I could tell you what effect sea-bathing was likely to produce. It would be injustice to deny that it has eased my pains, and I think has strengthened me; but my appetite is still extremely bad No flesh nor fish can I swallow: porridge and milk are the only thing I can taste. I are very happy to hear, by Miss Jess Lewars, that you are all well. My very best and kindest compliments to her, and to all the children. I will see you on Sunday.

Your affectionate husband, R. B.

No. CCLXXV.

TO MRS DUNLOP.

BROW, *Saturday, 12th July,* 1796.

MADAM,

I HAVE written you so often, without receiving any answer, that I would not trouble you again, but for the circumstances in which I am. An illness which has long hung about me, in all probability will speedily send me beyond that *bourn whence no traveller returns.* Your friendship, with which for many years you honoured me, was a friendship dearest to my soul. Your conversation, and especially your correspondence, were at once highly entertaining and instructive. With what pleasure did I use to break up the seal! The remembrance yet adds one pulse more to my poor palpitating heart. Farewell!!! R. B.*

* "Burns had, however, the pleasure, of receiving a satisfactory explanation of his friend's silence, and an assurance of the

No. CCLXXVI.

TO MR JAMES BURNESS,

WRITER, MONTROSE.

DUMFRIES, 12*th July*.

MY DEAR COUSIN,

WHEN you offered me money assistance, little did I think I should want it so soon. A rascal of a haberdasher, to whom I owe a considerable bill, taking it into his head that I am dying, has commenced a process against me, and will infallibly put my emaciated body into jail. Will you be so good as to accommodate me, and that by return of post, with ten pounds? O, James! did you know the pride of my heart, you would feel doubly for me! Alas! I am not used to beg! The worst of it is, my health was coming about finely; you know, and my physician assured me, that melancholy and low spirits are half my disease: guess, then, my horrors since this business began. If I had it settled, I would be, I think, quite well in a manner. How shall I use the language to you, O do not disappoint me! but strong necessity's curst command.

I have been thinking over and over my brother's affairs, and I fear I must cut him up; but on this I will correspond at another time, particularly as I shall [require] your advice.

continuance of her friendship to his widow and children; an assurance that has been amply fulfilled. It is probable that the greater part of her letters to him were destroyed by our bard about the time that this last was written. He did not foresee that his own letters to her were to appear in print, nor conceive the disappointment that will be felt, that a few of this excellent lady's have not served to enrich and adorn the collection. The above letter is supposed to be the last production of Robert Burns, who died on the 21st of the month, nine days afterwards." —*Currie.*

Forgive me for once more mentioning by return of post, —save me from the horrors of a jail!

My compliments to my friend James, and to all the rest. I do not know what I have written. The subject is so horrible, I dare not look it over again. Farewell.

R. B.

No. CCLXXVII.

TO JAMES GRACIE, ESQ.

BROW, *Wednesday Morning, 16th July*, 1796.

MY DEAR SIR,

IT would [be] doing high injustice to this place not to acknowledge that my rheumatisms have derived great benefits from it already; but, alas! my loss of appetite still continues. I shall not need your kind offer *this week*, and I return to town the beginning of next week, it not being a tide week. I am detaining a man in a burning hurry. So, God bless you. R. B.

No. CCLXXVIII.

TO JAMES ARMOUR, MASON,

MAUCHLINE.

DUMFRIES, 18*th July*, 1796.

MY DEAR SIR,

Do for heaven's sake, send Mrs Armour here immediately. My wife is hourly expecting to be put to bed. Good God! what a situation for her to be in, poor girl, without a friend! I returned from sea-bathing quarters to-day, and my medical friends would almost persuade me that I am

better, but I think and feel that my strength is so gone that the disorder will prove fatal to me.

Your son-in-law, R. B.

No. CCLXXIX.

TO MR WILLIAM BURNS.

ISLE, *March* 25, 1789.

I HAVE stolen from my corn-sowing this minute to write a line to accompany your shirt and hat, for I can no more. Your sister Nannie arrived yesternight, and begs to be remembered to you. Write me every opportunity—never mind postage. My head, too, is as addle as an egg this morning, with dining abroad yesterday. I received yours by the mason. Forgive me this foolish looking scrawl of an epistle.

I am ever,
My dear William,
Yours,

R. B.

P. S.—If you are not then gone from Longtown, I'll write you a long letter by this day se'ennight. If you should not succeed in your tramps, don't be dejected, or take any rash step—return to us in that case, and we will court Fortune's better humour. Remember this, I charge you.

R. B.*

* "We have been favoured by Mr J. Fraser, of the Red Lion Inn, Shakspeare Square, Edinburgh, (a poet of no mean powers, and author of 'Craigmillar,' the 'Soldier's Dream,' and many other pieces, 1 vol. published in Edinburgh some time ago,) with a copy of the above letter from the Bard of Ayrshire to his brother William. The letter is framed and placed between two plates of glass—is suspended in one of the public apartments of the "Red Lion," where, trifling though it be, it is regarded by many visitors as a relic of no ordinary interest, and may be seen by any of the Poet's admirers. The letter was presented by Mr

Begg, schoolmaster, Ormiston, East Lothian, the poet's nephew, (son of Nannie, alluded to in the letter,) to Mr St George, Haddington, and by the latter gentleman to our friend Fraser.—The Letter itself is common-place enough, but the P.S. is strongly characteristic of Burns.—*Kilmarnock Journal.*

LETTERS TO CLARINDA.

TO THE PUBLIC.

THE following letters, with the exception of one only, were written by ROBERT BURNS before his marriage. They are printed *verbatim* from the originals, and where any of them are torn, which unfortunately is the case with two or three, the deficiences are marked by *asterisks*.

The lady to whom they are addressed seems to have encouraged a friendly correspondence with the Poet, whose fascinating powers of mind must necessarily have produced, on her part, esteem, and admiration.

Yet, although he was forbidden to indulge the more tender affections of the heart, it was natural to expect, from the strong sensibility and delicate feelings of the Bard, that, in his correspondence with a young and amiable woman, love must be a principal theme.

As these letters, on perusal, will be found to possess every mark of the strong and vigorous mind of Burns, they will, in no degree, diminish that celebrity he has so justly merited by his epistolary compositions.

No. I.*

Thursday Evening.

MADAM,

I HAD set no small store by my tea-drinking to-night, and have not often been so disappointed. Saturday evening I shall embrace the opportunity with the greatest pleasure. I leave this town this day se'ennight, and, probably,

* This is generally printed as No. II. of the letters, while in fact it should be No. I. Its date must have been 6th Dec. 1787. He was to have drank tea that day, but was disappointed by the lady who asked him for Saturday, on which day the accident to his leg happened.—M.

for a couple of twelvemonths; but must ever regret that I so lately got an acquaintance I shall ever highly esteem, and in whose welfare I shall ever be warmly interested.

Our worthy common friend, in her usual pleasant way, rallied me a good deal on my new acquaintance, and in the humour of her ideas I wrote some lines, which I inclose you, as I think they have a good deal of poetic merit; and Miss ——— tells me you are not only a critic, but a poetess. Fiction, you know, is the native region of poetry; and I hope you will pardon my vanity in sending you the bagatelle as a tolerable off-hand *jeu-d'esprit*. I have several poetic trifles, which I shall gladly leave with Miss ———, or you, if they were worth house room; as there are scarcely two people on earth by whom it would mortify me more to be forgotten, though at the distance of ninescore miles. —I am, Madam, with the highest respect, your very humble Servant,

* * *

No. II.*

Saturday Evening.

I CAN say with truth, Madam, that I never met with a person in my life whom I more anxiously wished to meet again than yourself. To-night I was to have had that very great pleasure; I was intoxicated with the idea, but an unlucky fall from a coach has so bruised one of my knees, that I can't stir my leg; so if I don't see you again, I shall not rest in my grave for chagrin. I was vexed to the soul I had not seen you sooner; I determined to cultivate your friendship with the enthusiasm of religion; but thus has Fortune ever served me. I cannot bear the idea of leaving

* The date of this letter is 8th Dec. 1787. Burns met with his accident on that day. Vide his letter to Miss Chalmers, in which he alludes to that unlucky occurrence.—M.

Edinburgh without seeing you. I know not how to account for it—I am strangely taken with some people, nor am I often mistaken. You are a stranger to me; but I am an odd being: some yet unnamed feelings, things, not principles, but better than whims, carry me farther than boasted reason ever did a philosopher.—Farewell! every happiness be yours!

No. III.

Friday Evening, 22d Dec., 1787.

I BEG your pardon, my dear "Clarinda,"* for the fragment scrawl I sent you yesterday. I really do not know what I wrote. A gentleman, for whose character, abilities, and critical knowledge, I have the highest veneration, called in just as I had begun the second sentence, and I would not make the porter wait. I read to my much-respected friend several of my own bagatelles, and, among others, your lines, which I had copied out. He began some criticisms on them as on the other pieces, when I informed him they were the work of a young lady in this town, which, I assure you, made him stare. My learned friend seriously protested, that he did not believe any young woman in Edinburgh was capable of such lines; and if you know any thing of Professor Gregory, you will neither doubt of his abilities nor his sincerity. I do love you, if possible, still better for having so fine a taste and turn for poesy. I have again gone wrong in my usual unguarded way, but you may erase the word, and put esteem, respect, or any other tame Dutch expression you please in its place. I believe there is no holding converse, or carrying on correspondence, with an

* This does not appear. It probably talked of love, and called forth the verses beginning, "Talk not of love," and to which she must have signed Clarinda, from its being marked as a quotation.—M.

amiable woman, much less a *gloriously amiable fine woman*, without some mixture of that delicious passion, whose most devoted slave I have more than once had the honour of being—But why be hurt or offended on that account? Can no honest man have a prepossession for a fine woman, but he must run his head against an intrigue? Take a little of the tender witchcraft of love, and add to it the generous, the honourable sentiments of manly friendship: and I know but *one* more delightful morsel, which few, few in any rank ever taste. Such a composition is like adding cream to strawberries; it not only gives the fruit a more elegant richness, but has a peculiar deliciousness of its own.

I inclose you a few lines I composed on a late melancholy occasion. I will not give above five or six copies of it at all, and I would be hurt if any friend should give any copies without my consent.

You cannot imagine, Clarinda (I like the idea of Arcadian names in a commerce of this kind), how much store I have set by the hopes of your future friendship. I do not know if you have a just idea of my character, but I wish you to see me *as I am*. I am, as most people of my trade are, a strange Will-o'-Wisp being; the victim, too frequently, of much imprudence and many follies. My great constituent elements are *pride* and *passion*. The first I have endeavoured to humanize into integrity and honour; the last makes me a devotee to the warmest degree of enthusiasm, in love, religion, or friendship—either of them, or all together, as I happen to be inspired. 'Tis true, I never saw you but once; but how much acquaintance did I form with you in that once! Do not think I flatter you, or have a design upon you, Clarinda; I have too much pride for the one, and too little cold contrivance for the other; but of all God's creatures I ever could approach in the beaten way of my acquaintance, you struck me with the deepest, the strongest, the most permanent impression. I say, the most permanent, because I know

myself well, and how far I can promise either in my prepossessions or powers. Why are you unhappy? And why are so many of our fellow-creatures, unworthy to belong to the same species with you, blest with all they can wish? You have a hand all benevolent to give—Why were you denied the pleasure? You have a heart formed—gloriously formed—for all the most refined luxuries of love: Why was that heart ever wrung? O Clarinda! shall we not meet in a state, some yet unknown state of being, where the lavish hand of plenty shall minister to the highest wish of benevolence; and where the chill north-wind of prudence shall never blow over the flowery fields of enjoyment? If we do not, man was made in vain! I deserved most of the unhappy hours that have lingered over my head; they were the wages of my labour: but what unprovoked demon, malignant as hell, stole upon the confidence of unmistrusting busy Fate, and dashed *your* cup of life with undeserved sorrow?

Let me know how long your stay will be out of town; I shall count the hours till you inform me of your return. Cursed *etiquette* forbids your seeing me just now; and so soon as I can walk I must bid Edinburgh adieu. Lord, why was I born to see misery which I cannot relieve, and to meet with friends whom I cannot enjoy? I look back with the pang of unavailing avarice on my loss in not knowing you sooner: all last winter, these three months past, what luxury of intercourse have I not lost! Perhaps, though, 'twas better for my peace. You see I am either above, or incapable of dissimulation. I believe it is want of that particular genius. I despise design, because I want either coolness or wisdom to be capable of it. I am interrupted.—Adieu! my dear Clarinda!

SYLVANDER.*

* The date of this letter is most likely the 22d or 29th of December, for in his first letter to Capt. Brown, he says on the 30th Dec. they were sent 'tother day.—M.

No. IV.*

You are right, my dear Clarinda: a friendly correspondence goes for nothing, except one write their undisguised sentiments. Yours please me for their intrinsic merit, as well as because they are *yours*, which, I assure you, is to me a high recommendation. Your religious sentiments, Madam, I revere. If you have, on some suspicious evidence, from some lying oracle, learned that I despise or ridicule so sacredly important a matter as real religion, you have, my Clarinda, much misconstrued your friend.—"I am not mad, most noble Festus!" Have you ever met a perfect character? Do we not sometimes rather exchange faults than get rid of them? For instance, I am perhaps tired with, and shocked at a life too much the prey of giddy inconsistencies and thoughtless follies; by degrees I grow sober, prudent, and statedly pious—I say statedly, because the most unaffected devotion is not at all inconsistent with my first character—I join the world in congratulating myself on the happy change. But let me pry more narrowly into this affair. Have I, at bottom, any thing of a secret pride in these endowments and emendations? Have I nothing of a presbyterian sourness, an hypocritical severity, when I survey my less regular neighbours? In a word, have I missed all those nameless and numberless modifications of indistinct selfishness, which are so near our own eyes, that we can scarcely bring them within the sphere of our vision, and which the known spotless cambric of our character hides from the ordinary observer?

My definition of worth is short; truth and humanity respecting our fellow-creatures; reverence and humility in the presence of that Being, my Creator and Preserver, and who, I have every reason to believe, will one day be my

* This letter appears to have been written about 1st January, and probably the order in which it is now inserted is correct.—M.

Judge. The first part of my definition is the creature of unbiassed instinct; the last is the child of after reflection. Where I found these two essentials, I would gently note, and slightly mention, any attendant flaws—flaws, the marks, the consequences of human nature.

I can easily enter into the sublime pleasures that your strong imagination and keen sensibility must derive from religion, particularly if a little in the shade of misfortune; but I own I cannot, without a marked grudge, see Heaven totally engross so amiable, so charming a woman, as my friend Clarinda; and should be very well pleased at *a circumstance* that would put it in the power of somebody (happy somebody!) to divide her attention, with all the delicacy and tenderness of an earthly attachment.

You will not easily persuade me that you have not a grammatical knowledge of the English language. So far from being inaccurate, you are elegant beyond any woman of my acquaintance, except one, whom I wish you knew.

Your last verses to me have so delighted me, that I have got an excellent old Scots air that suits the measure, and you shall see them in print in the Scots Musical Museum, a work publishing by a friend of mine in this town. I want four stanzas; you gave me but three, and one of them alluded to an expression in my former letter; so I have taken your two first verses, with a slight alteration in the second, and have added a third; but you must help me to a fourth. Here they are: the latter half of the first stanza would have been worthy of Sappho; I am in raptures with it.

Talk not of Love, it gives me pain,
  For Love has been my foe:
He bound me with an iron chain,
  And sunk me deep in woe.

But Friendship's pure and lasting joys
  My heart was formed to prove:
There, welcome, win and wear the prize,
  But never talk of love.

Your friendship much can make me blest,
O why that bliss destroy!
[only]
Why urge the odious one request,
[will]
You know I must deny.

The alteration in the second stanza is no improvement, but there was a slight inaccuracy in your rhyme. The third I only offer to your choice, and have left two words for your determination. The air is 'The banks of Spey,' and is most beautiful.

To-morrow evening I intend taking a chair, and paying a visit at Park Place to a much-valued old friend. If I could be sure of finding you at home, (and I will send one of the chairmen to call) I would spend from five to six o'clock with you, as I go past. I cannot do more at this time, as I have something on my hand that hurries me much. I propose giving you the first call, my old friend the second, and Miss ——— as I return home. Do not break any engagement for me, as I will spend another evening with you at any rate before I leave town.

Do not tell me that you are pleased when your friends inform you of your faults. I am ignorant what they are; but I am sure they must be such evanescent trifles, compared with your personal and mental accomplishments, that I would despise the ungenerous narrow soul who would notice any shadow of imperfections you may seem to have, any other way than in the most delicate agreeable raillery. Coarse minds are not aware how much they injure the keenly feeling tie of bosom-friendship, when, in their foolish officiousness, they mention what nobody cares for recollecting. People of nice sensibility, and generous minds, have a certain intrinsic dignity, that fires at being trifled with, or lowered, or even too nearly approached.

You need make no apology for long letters: I am even with you. Many happy new years to you, charming Clarinda! I can't dissemble, were it to shun perdition. He who sees you as I have done, and does not love you, de-

serves to be damn'd for his stupidity! He who loves you, and would injure you, deserves to be doubly damn'd for his villany! Adieu.

SYLVANDER.

P. S. What would you think of this for a fourth stanza?

Your thought, if love must harbour there,
Conceal it in that thought,
Nor cause me from my bosom tear
The very friend I sought.

No. V.

Monday Evening, 11 *o'clock*, 21*st January*.

WHY have I not heard from you, Clarinda? To-day I expected it; and before supper, when a letter to me was announced, my heart danced with rapture: but behold, 'twas some fool, who had taken it into his head to turn poet, and made me an offering of the first-fruits of his nonsense. "It is not poetry, but prose run mad." Did I ever repeat to you an epigram I made on a Mr Elphinstone, who has given a translation of Martial, a famous Latin poet? The poetry of Elphinstone can only equal his prose notes. I was sitting in a merchant's shop of my acquaintance, waiting somebody; he put Elphinstone into my hand, and asked my opinion of it; I begged leave to write it on a blank leaf, which I did,

TO MR ELPHINSTONE, &c.

O thou, whom poesy abhors!
Whom prose has turned out of doors!
Heardst thou yon groan? proceed no further!
'Twas laurel'd Martial calling murther!

I am determined to see you, if at all possible, on Saturday evening. Next week I must sing—

The night is my departing night,
  The morn's the day I maun awa;
There's neither friend nor foe o' mine,
  But wishes that I were awa!
What I hae done for lack o' wit,
  I never, never can reca';
I hope ye're a' my friends as yet,
  Gude night, and joy be wi' you a'!

If I could see you sooner, I would be so much the happier; but I would not purchase the *dearest gratification* on earth, if it must be at your expense in worldly censure, far less inward peace!

I shall certainly be ashamed of thus scrawling whole sheets of incoherence. The only *unity* (a sad word with poets and critics!) in my ideas, is CLARINDA. There my heart "reigns and revels."

"What art thou, Love? whence are those charms,
  That thus thou bear'st an universal rule?
For thee the soldier quits his arms,
  The king turns slave, the wise man fool.
In vain we chase thee from the field,
  And with cool thoughts resist thy yoke.
Next tide of blood, alas! we yield;
  And all those high resolves are broke!"

I like to have quotations for every occasion. They give one's ideas so pat, and save one the trouble of finding expression adequate to one's feelings. I think it is one of the greatest pleasures attending a poetic genius, that we can give our woes, cares, joys, loves, &c., an embodied form in verse, which, to me, is ever immediate ease. Goldsmith says finely of his Muse—

"Thou source of all my bliss and all my wo;
  Thou foundst me poor at first, and keep'st me so."

My limb has been so well to-day, that I have gone up and down stairs often without my staff. To-morrow I hope to walk once again on my own legs to dinner. It is only next street—Adieu.

SYLVANDER.

No. VI.

Saturday Noon, 26th January.

Some days, some nights, nay, some *hours*, like the "ten righteous persons in Sodom," save the rest of the vapid, tiresome, miserable months and years of life. One of these hours, my dear Clarinda blest me with yesternight.

> ——'One well spent hour,
> In such a tender circumstance for friends,
> Is better than an age of common time!'
>
> THOMSON.

My favourite feature in Milton's Satan, is his manly fortitude in supporting what cannot be remedied—in short, the wild broken fragments of a noble exalted mind in ruins. I meant no more by saying he was a favourite hero of mine.

I mentioned to you my letter to Dr Moore, giving an account of my life: it is truth, every word of it; and will give you the just idea of a man whom you have honoured with your friendship. I am afraid you will hardly be able to make sense of so torn a piece.—Your verses I shall muse on, deliciously, as I gaze on your image in my mind's eye, in my heart's core: they will be in time enough for a week to come. I am truly happy your head-ache is better.—O, how can pain or evil be so daringly, unfeelingly, cruelly savage, as to wound so noble a mind, so lovely a form!

My little fellow is all my name-sake.—Write me soon. My every, strongest good wishes attend you, Clarinda!

SYLVANDER.

I know not what I have written—I am pestered with people around me.

No. VII.

Sunday Night, 27th January?

THE impertinence of fools has joined with a return of an old indisposition, to make me good for nothing to-day. The paper has lain before me all this evening, to write to my dear Clarinda, but—

"Fools rush'd on fools, as waves succeed to waves."

I cursed them in my soul; they sacriligeously disturbed my meditations on her who holds my heart. What a creature is man! A little alarm last night and to-day, that I am mortal, has made such a revolution on my spirits! There is no philosophy, no divinity, comes half so home to the mind. I have no idea of courage that braves heaven. 'Tis the wild ravings of an imaginary hero in bedlam.

I can no more, Clarinda; I can scarcely hold up my head; but I am happy you do not know it, you would be so uneasy.

SYLVANDER.

Monday Morning, 28th January.

I am, my lovely friend, much better this morning on the whole; but I have a horrid languor on my spirits.

'Sick of the world, and all its joys,
My soul in pining sadness mourns;
Dark scenes of woe my mind employs,
The past and present in their turns.'

Have you ever met with a saying of the great, and likewise good Mr Locke, author of the famous Essay on the Human Understanding? He wrote a letter to a friend, directing it, 'not to be delivered till after my decease:' it ended thus—"I know you loved me when living, and will preserve my memory now I am dead. All the use to be

made of it is, that this life affords no solid satisfaction, but in the consciousness of having done well, and the hopes of another life. Adieu! I leave my best wishes with you.

J. Locke."

Clarinda, may I reckon on your friendship for life? I think I may. Thou Almighty Preserver of men! thy friendship, which hitherto I have too much neglected, to secure it shall, all the future days and nights of my life, be my steady care! The idea of my Clarinda follows—

'Hide it, my heart, within that close disguise,
Where, mix'd with God's, her lov'd idea lies.'

But I fear that inconstancy, the consequent imperfection of human weakness. Shall I meet with a friendship that defies years of absence, and the chances and changes of fortune? Perhaps 'such things are;' *one honest* man* I have great hopes from that way: but who, except a romance writer, would think on a *love* that could promise for life, in spite of distance, absence, chance, and change; and that too, with slender hopes of fruition? For my own part, I can say to myself in both requisitions, 'Thou art the man! I dare, in cool resolve I dare, declare myself that friend, and that lover. If womankind is capable of such things, Clarinda is. I trust that she is; and feel I shall be miserable if she is not. There is not one virtue which gives worth, or one sentiment which does honour to the sex, that she does not possess, superior to any woman I ever saw: her exalted mind, aided a little perhaps, by her situation, is, I think, capable of that nobly-romantic love-enthusiasm.

May I see you on Wednesday evening, my dear angel? The next Wednesday again will, I conjecture, be a hated day to us both. I tremble for censorious remark, for your sake; but in extraordinary cases, may not usual and useful precaution be a little dispensed with? Three evenings,

* Alluding to Captain Brown.

three swift-winged evenings, with pinions of down, are all the past; I dare not calculate the future. I shall call at Miss ——'s to morrow evening; 'twill be a farewell call.

I have wrote out my last sheet of paper, so I am reduced to my last half-sheet. What a strange mysterious faculty is that thing called imagination! We have no ideas almost at all of another world; but I have often amused myself with visionary schemes of what happiness might be enjoyed by small alterations—alterations that we can fully enter into, in this present state of existence. For instance, suppose you and I, just as we are at present; the same reasoning powers, sentiments, and even desires; the same fond curiosity for knowledge and remarking observation in our minds; and imagine our bodies free from pain and the necessary supplies for the wants of nature at all times, and easily within our reach: imagine further, that we were set free from the laws of gravitation, which bind us to this globe, and could at pleasure fly, without inconvenience, through all the yet unconjectured bounds of creation, what a life of bliss would we lead, in our mutual pursuit of virtue and knowledge, and our mutual enjoyment of friendship and love!

I see you laughing at my fairy fancies, and calling me a voluptuous Mahometan; but I am certain I would be a happy creature, beyond any thing we call bliss here below; nay, it would be a paradise congenial to you too. Don't you see us, hand in hand, or rather, my arm about your lovely waist, making our remarks on Sirius, the nearest of the fixed stars; or surveying a comet, flaming innoxious by us, as we just now would mark the passing pomp of a travelling monarch; or in a shady bower of Mercury or Venus, dedicating the hour to love, in mutual converse, relying honour, and revelling endearment, whilst the most exalted strains of poesy and harmony would be the ready spontaneous language of our souls! Devotion is the favourite employment of your heart; so is it of mine: what incentives then to, and powers for reverence, gratitude, faith,

and hope, in all the fervours of adoration and praise to that Being, whose unsearchable wisdom, power, and goodness, so pervaded, so inspired, every sense and feeling!—By this time, I dare say, you will be blessing the neglect of the maid that leaves me destitute of paper!

SYLVANDER.

No. VIII.*

Tuesday Night.

I AM delighted, charming Clarinda, with your honest enthusiasm for religion. Those of either sex, but particularly the female, who are lukewarm in that most important of all things, "O my soul, come not thou into their secrets!" —I feel myself deeply interested in your good opinion, and will lay before you the outlines of my belief. He, who is our Author and Preserver, and will one day be our Judge, must be (not for his sake in the way of duty, but from the native impulse of our hearts) the object of our reverential awe and grateful adoration: He is Almighty and all-bounteous, we are weak and dependent; hence prayer and every other sort of devotion.——'He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to everlasting life;' consequently it must be in every one's power to embrace his offer of 'everlasting life;' otherwise he could not, in justice, condemn those who did not. A mind pervaded, actuated, and governed by purity, truth, and charity, though it does not *merit* heaven, yet is an absolutely necessary pre-requisite, without which heaven can neither be obtained nor enjoyed; and, by divine promise, such a mind shall never fail of attaining 'everlasting life:' hence the impure, the deceiving, and the uncharitable, extrude themselves from eternal bliss, by their unfitness for enjoying it. The

* This appears to have been written on the 8th or 15th of January.

Supreme Being has put the immediate administration of all this, for wise and good ends known to himself, into the hands of Jesus Christ, a great personage, whose relation to him we cannot comprehend, but whose relation to us is a guide and Saviour; and who, except for our own obstinacy and misconduct, will bring us all, through various ways, and by various means, to bliss at last.

These are my tenets, my lovely friend; and which, I think, cannot be well disputed. My creed is pretty nearly expressed in the last clause of Jamie Dean's grace, an honest weaver in Ayrshire; 'Lord, grant that we may lead a gude life! for a gude life maks a gude end, at least it helps weel!'

I am flattered by the entertainment you tell me you have found in my packet. You see me as I have been, you know me as I am, and may guess at what I am likely to be. I too may say, 'Talk not of love,' &c. for indeed he has 'plunged me deep in woe!' Not that I ever saw a woman who pleased unexceptionably, as my Clarinda elegantly says, "In the companion, the friend, and the mistress." *One* indeed I could except—*One*, before passion threw its mists over my discernment, I knew *the* first of women! Her name is indelibly written in my heart's core—but I dare not look in on it—a degree of agony would be the consequence. Oh! thou perfidious, cruel, mischief-making demon, who presidest over that frantic passion—thou mayest, thou dost poison my peace, but thou shalt not taint my honour—I would not, for a single moment, give an asylum to the most distant imagination, that would shadow the faintest outline of a selfish gratification, at the expense of her whose happiness is twisted with the threads of my existence.——May she be as happy as she deserves! And if my tenderest, faithfullest friendship, can add to her bliss, I shall at least have one solid mine of enjoyment in my bosom! *Don't guess at these ravings!*

I watched at our front window to-day, but was disappointed. It has been a day of disappointments. I am just

risen from a two hours' bout after supper, with silly or sordid souls, who could relish nothing in common with me but the Port.—— *One*——'Tis now "witching time of night;" and whatever is out of joint in the foregoing scrawl, impute it to enchantments and spells; for I can't look over it, but will seal it up directly, as I don't care for to-morrow's criticisms on it.

You are by this time fast asleep, Clarinda; may good angels attend and guard you as constantly and faithfully as my good wishes do.

> "Beauty, which, whether waking or asleep,
> Shot forth peculiar graces."

John Milton, I wish thy soul better rest than I expect on my pillow to-night! O for a little of the cart-horse part of human nature! Good night my dearest Clarinda!

SYLVANDER.

No. IX.

Thursday Noon, 10th or 17th January.

I am certain I saw you, Clarinda; but you don't look to the proper story for a poet's lodging—

> 'Where speculation roosted near the sky.'

I could almost have thrown myself over for very vexation. Why didn't you look higher? It has spoiled my peace for this day. To be so near my charming Clarinda; to miss her look when it was searching for me—I am sure the soul is capable of disease, for mine has convulsed itself into an inflammatory fever.

You have converted me, Clarinda. (I shall love that name while I live: there is heavenly music in it). Booth and Amelia I know well.* Your sentiments on that subject, as they are on every subject, are just and noble. 'To

* See Fielding's novel of Amelia.

be feelingly alive to kindness, and to unkindness,' is a charming female character.

What I said in my last letter, the powers of fuddling sociality only know for me. By yours, I understand my good star has been partly in my horizon, when I got wild in my reveries. Had that evil planet, which has almost all my life shed its baleful rays on my devoted head, been, as usual, in my zenith, I had certainly blabbed something that would have pointed out to you the dear object of my tenderest friendship, and, in spite of me, something more. Had that fatal information escaped me, and it was merely chance, or kind stars, that it did not, I had been undone! You would never have written me, except perhaps *once* more! O, I could curse circumstances, and the coarse tie of human laws, which keeps fast what common sense would loose, and which bars that happiness itself cannot give—happiness which otherwise Love and Honour would warrant! But hold—I shall make no more 'hair breadth 'scapes.'

My friendship, Clarinda, is a life-rent business. My likings are both strong and eternal. I told you I had but one male friend: I have but two female. I should have a third, but she is surrounded by the blandishments of flattery and courtship. *** I register in my heart's core—******. Miss N—— can tell you how divine she is. She is worthy of a place in the same bosom with my Clarinda. That is the highest compliment I can pay her.

Farewell, Clarinda! Remember

SYLVANDER.

No. X.

Saturday Morning, 12th or 19th January.

Your thoughts on religion, Clarinda, shall be welcome. You may perhaps distrust me, when I say 'tis also my

favourite topic; but mine is the religion of the bosom. I hate the very idea of a controversial divinity; as I firmly believe, that every honest upright man, of whatever sect, will be accepted of the Deity. If your verses, as you seem to hint, contain censure, except you want an occasion to break with me, don't send them. I have a little infirmity in my disposition, that where I fondly love, or highly esteem, I cannot bear reproach.

"Reverence thyself" is a sacred maxim, and I wish to cherish it. I think I told you Lord Bolingbroke's saying to Swift—"Adieu, dear Swift, with all thy faults I love thee entirely; make an effort to love me with all mine." A glorious sentiment, and without which there can be no friendship! I do highly, very highly esteem you indeed, Clarinda—you merit it all! Perhaps, too, I scorn dissimulation! I could fondly love you: judge then what a maddening sting your reproach would be. "O! I have sins to *Heaven* but none to *you!*"—With what pleasure would I meet you to-day, but I cannot walk to meet the fly. I hope to be able to see you on *foot*, about the middle of next week.

I am interrupted—perhaps you are not sorry for it, you will tell me—but I wont anticipate blame. O Clarinda! did you know how dear to me is your look of kindness, your smile of approbation! you would not, either in prose or verse, risk a censorious remark.

"Curst be the verse, how well soe'er it flow,
That tends to make one worthy man my foe!"

SYLVANDER.

No. XI.

Tuesday Morning, 29th January.

I CANNOT go out to-day, my dearest Clarinda, without sending you half a line, by way of a sin-offering; but, be-

lieve me, 'twas the sin of ignorance. Could you think that I *intended* to hurt you by any thing I said yesternight? Nature has been too kind to you for your happiness, your delicacy, your sensibility.—O why should such glorious qualifications be the fruitful source of woe! You have 'murdered sleep' to me last night. I went to bed, impressed with an idea that you were unhappy; and every start I closed my eyes, busy Fancy painted you in such scenes of romantic misery, that I would almost be persuaded you were not well this morning.

> ——————'If I unweeting have offended,
> Impute it not.'
> ——————'But while we live,
> But one short hour perhaps, between us two,
> Let there be peace.'

If Mary is not gone by this reaches you, give her my best compliments. She is a charming girl, and highly worthy of the noblest love.

I send you a poem to read, till I call on you this night, which will be about nine. I wish I could procure some potent spell, some fairy charm, that would protect from injury, or restore to rest, that bosom-chord, 'tremblingly alive all o'er,' on which hangs your peace of mind. I thought, vainly, I fear, thought that the devotion of love—love strong as even you can feel—love guarded, invulnerably guarded, by all the purity of virtue, and all the pride of honour; I thought such a love would make you happy—will I be mistaken? I can no more for hurry * * * *

No. XII.

Sunday Morning, 3d February.

I HAVE just been before the throne of my God, Clarinda; according to my association of ideas, my sentiments of love and friendship, I next devote myself to you. Yester-

night I was happy—happiness 'that the world cannot give. —I kindle at the recollection; but it is a flame where innocence looks smiling on, and honour stands by a sacred guard.—Your heart, your fondest wishes, your dearest thoughts, these are yours to bestow: your person is unapproachable by the laws of your country; and he loves not as I do, who would make you miserable.

You are an angel, Clarinda; you are surely no mortal that 'the earth owns.'—To kiss your hand, to live on your smile, is to me far more exquisite bliss, than the dearest favours that the fairest of the sex, yourself excepted, can bestow.

Sunday Evening.

You are the constant companion of my thoughts. How wretched is the condition of one who is haunted with conscious guilt, and trembling under the idea of dreaded vengeance! and what a placid calm, what a charming secret enjoyment it gives, to bosom the kind feelings of friendship, and the fond throes of love! Out upon the tempest of anger, the acrimonious gall of fretful impatience, the sullen frost of louring resentment, or the corroding poison of withered envy! They eat up the immortal part of man! If they spent their fury only on the unfortunate objects of them, it would be something in their favour; but these miserable passions, like traitor Iscariot, betray their lord and master.

Thou Almighty Author of peace, and goodness, and love! do thou give me the social heart that kindly tastes of every man's cup! Is it a draught of joy?—warm and open my heart to share it with cordial unenvying rejoicing! Is it the bitter potion of sorrow?—melt my heart with sincerely sympathetic woe! Above all, do thou give me the manly mind, that resolutely exemplifies, in life and manners, those sentiments which I would wish to be thought to possess! The friend of my soul—there, may I never deviate from the firmest fidelity and most active kindness! Clarinda,

the dear object of my fondest love; there, may the most sacred inviolate honour, the most faithful kindling constancy, ever watch and animate my every thought and imagination!

Did you ever meet with the following lines spoken of Religion, your darling topic?

'*'Tis this*, my friend, that streaks our morning bright;
'Tis this that gilds the horrors of our night;
When wealth forsakes us, and when friends are few,
When friends are faithless, or when foes pursue;
'Tis this that wards the blow, or stills the smart,
Disarms affliction, or repels its dart:
Within the breast bids purest rapture rise,
Bids smiling Conscience spread her cloudless skies.'

I met with these verses very early in life, and was so delighted with them, that I have them by me, copied at school.

Good night and sound rest, my dearest Clarinda!

SYLVANDER.

No. XIII.*

I was on the way, *my Love*, to meet you, (I never do things by halves) when I got your card. M——— goes out of town to-morrow morning, to see a brother of his who is newly arrived from ———. I am determined that he and I shall call on you together: so, look you, lest I should never see to-morrow, we will call on you to-night;——— and you may put off tea till about seven; at which time, in the Galloway phrase, 'an the beast be to the fore, an the branks bide hale,' expect the humblest of your humble servants, and his dearest friend. We propose staying only half an hour, 'for ought we ken.' I could suffer the lash of misery eleven months in the year, were the twelfth to be composed of hours like yesternight. You are the soul

* This letter must have been written early in February.

of my enjoyment: all else is of the stuff and stocks of stones.

SYLVANDER.

No. XIV.

Thursday Morning, 7th February.

"Unlavish Wisdom never works in vain."

I HAVE been tasking my reason, Clarinda, why a woman, who, for native genius, poignant wit, strength of mind, generous sincerity of soul, and the sweetest female tenderness, is without a peer, and whose personal charms have few, very, very few parallels, among her sex; why, or how she should fall to the blessed lot of a poor hairum scairum poet, whom Fortune had kept for her particular use, to wreak her temper on whenever she was in ill humour. One time I conjectured, that as Fortune is the most capricious jade ever known, she may have taken, not a fit of remorse, but a paroxysm of whim, to raise the poor devil out of the mire, where he had so often and so conveniently served her as a stepping stone, and given him the most glorious boon she ever had in her gift, merely for the maggot's sake, to see how his fool head and his fool heart will bear it. At other times I was vain enough to think, that Nature, who has a great deal to say with Fortune, had given the coquettish goddess some such hint as, "Here is a paragon of female excellence, whose equal, in all my former compositions, I never was lucky enough to hit on, and despair of ever doing so again; you have cast her rather in the shades of life; there is a certain Poet of my making; among your frolics it would not be amiss to attach him to this masterpiece of my hand, to give her that immortality among mankind, which no woman, of any age, ever more deserved, and which few rhymsters of this age are better able to confer."

Evening, 9 o'clock.

I AM here, absolutely unfit to finish my letter—pretty hearty after a bowl, which has been constantly plied since dinner till this moment, I have been with Mr Schetki, the musician, and he has set it * finely.———I have no distinct ideas of any thing, but that I have drunk your health twice to-night, and that you are all my soul holds dear in this world.

SYLVANDER.

No. XV.

Saturday Morning, 9th February.

THERE is no time, my Clarinda, when the conscious thrilling chords of Love and Friendship give such delight, as in the pensive hours of what our favourite Thomson calls, 'Philosophic Melancholy.' The sportive insects, who bask in the sunshine of prosperity; or the worms that luxuriant crawl amid their ample wealth of earth, they need no Clarinda: they would despise Sylvander—if they durst. The family of Misfortune, a numerous group of brothers and sisters! they need a resting place to their souls: unnoticed, often condemned by the world; in some degree, perhaps, condemned by themselves, they feel the full enjoyment of ardent love, delicate tender endearments, mutual esteem and mutual reliance.

In this light I have often admired religion. In proportion as we are wrung with grief, or distracted with anxiety, the ideas of a compassionate Deity, an Almighty Protector, are doubly dear.

> "'*Tis this*, my Friend, that streaks our morning bright;
> '*Tis this* that gilds the horrors of our night."

* 'Clarinda, mistress of my soul,'—&c.—*See Poems, Vol.* ii. p. 119.

I have been this morning taking a peep through, as Young finely says, 'the dark postern of time long elaps'd;' and, you will easily guess, 'twas a rueful prospect. What a tissue of thoughtlessness, weakness, and folly! My life reminded me of a ruined temple; what strength, what proportion in some parts! what unsightly gaps, what prostrate ruins in others! I kneeled down before the Father of mercies, and said, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son!' I rose, eased and strengthened. I despise the superstition of a fanatic, but I love the religion of a man. 'The future,' said I to myself, 'is still before me;' there let me

——'On reason build resolve,
That column of true majesty in man!'

'I have difficulties many to encounter,' said I; 'but they are not absolutely insuperable: and where is firmness of mind shown but in exertion? mere declamation is bombast rant.'—Besides, wherever I am, or in whatever situation I may be—

'———'Tis nought to me:
Since God is ever present, ever felt,
In the void waste as in the city full;
And where He vital breathes, there must be joy!'

Saturday Night—half after Ten.

What luxury of bliss I was enjoying this time yesternight! My ever-dearest Clarinda, you have stolen away my soul: but you have refined, you have exalted it: you have given it a stronger sense of virtue, and a stronger relish for piety.—Clarinda, first of your sex, if ever I am the veriest wretch on earth to forget you; if ever your lovely image is effaced from my soul,

'May I be lost, no eye to weep my end;
And find no earth that's base enough to bury me!'

What trifling silliness is the childish fondness of the

every-day children of the world! 'tis the unmeaning toying of the younglings of the fields and forests: but where Sentiment and Fancy unite their sweets; where Taste and Delicacy refine; where Wit adds the flavour, and Good-sense gives strength and spirit to all, what a delicious draught is the hour of tender endearment!—Beauty and Grace, in the arms of Truth and Honour, in all the luxury of mutual love.

Clarinda, have you ever seen the picture realized? Not in all its very richest colouring.

Last night, Clarinda, but for one slight shade, was the glorious picture—

> ———Innocence
> Look'd, gaily smiling on; while rosy Pleasure
> Hid young Desire amid her flowery wreath,
> And pour'd her cup luxuriant; mantling high,
> The sparkling heavenly vintage, Love and Bliss!

Clarinda, when a poet and poetess of Nature's making, two of Nature's noblest productions! when they drink together of the same cup of Love and Bliss—attempt not, ye coarser stuff of human nature, profanely to measure enjoyment ye never can know!—Good night, my dear Clarinda!

SYLVANDER.

No. XVI.

About 10th February.

MY EVER DEAREST CLARINDA,

I MAKE a numerous dinner party wait me while I read yours, and write this. Do not require that I should cease to love you, to adore you in my soul—'tis to me impossible—your peace and happiness are to me dearer than my soul—name the terms on which you wish to see me, to correspond with me, and you have them—I must love, pine, mourn, and adore in secret—this you must not deny me—you will ever be to me—

"Dear as the light that visits these sad eyes,
Dear as the ruddy drops that warm my heart!"

I have not patience to read the puritanic scrawl.—Vile sophistry!—Ye heavens! thou God of nature! thou Redeemer of mankind! ye look down with approving eyes on a passion inspired by the purest flame, and guarded by truth, delicacy, and honour; but the half-inch soul of an unfeeling, cold-blooded, pitiful presbyterian bigot, cannot forgive any thing above his dungeon bosom and foggy head.

Farewell; I'll be with you to-morrow evening—and be at rest in your mind—I will be yours in the way you think most to your happiness! I dare not proceed—I love, and will love you, and will with joyous confidence approach the throne of the almighty Judge of men, with your dear idea, and will despise the scum of sentiment, and the mist of sophistry

SYLVANDER.

No. XVII.

Tuesday Evening, 12th Feb.

THAT you have faults, my Clarinda, I never doubted; but I knew not where they existed, and Saturday night made me more in the dark than ever. O Clarinda! why will you wound my soul, by hinting that last night must have lessened my opinion of you? True, I was "behind the scenes with you;" but what did I see? A bosom glowing with honour and benevolence; a mind ennobled by genius, informed and refined by education and reflection, and exalted by native religion, genuine as in the climes of heaven; a heart formed for all the glorious meltings of friendship, love, and pity. These I saw.—I saw the noblest immortal soul creation ever showed me.

I looked long, my dear Clarinda, for your letter; and am vexed that you are complaining. I have not caught you so

far wrong as in your idea, that the commerce you have with *one* friend hurts you, if you cannot tell every tittle of it to *another*. Why have so injurious a suspicion of a good God, Clarinda, as to think that Friendship and Love, on the sacred inviolate principles of Truth, Honour, and Religion, can be any thing else than an object of his divine approbation.

I have mentioned, in some of my former scrawls, Saturday evening next. Do allow me to wait on you that evening. Oh, my angel! how soon must we part! and when can we meet again! I looked forward on the horrid interval with tearful eyes! What have I lost by not knowing you sooner. I fear, I fear my acquaintance with you is too short, to make that *lasting* impression on your heart I could wish.

SYLVANDER.

No. XVIII.

"I AM distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan!" I have suffered, Clarinda, from your letter. My soul was in arms at the sad perusal; I dreaded that I had acted wrong. If I have robbed you of a friend, God forgive me! But, Clarinda, be comforted: let us raise the tone of our feelings a little higher and bolder. A fellow creature who leaves us, who spurns us without just cause, though once our bosom friend—up with a little honest pride—let them go! How shall I comfort you, who am the cause of the injury? Can I wish that I had never seen you? that we had never met? No! I never will. But have I thrown you friendless?—there is almost distraction in that thought.

Father of mercies! against thee often have I sinned; through thy grace I will endeavour to do so no more! She who, Thou knowest, is dearer to me than myself, pour Thou the balm of peace into her past wounds, and hedge her about with Thy peculiar care, all her future days and nights!

Strengthen her tender noble mind, firmly to suffer, and magnanimously to bear! Make me worthy of that friendship she honours me with. May my attachment to her be pure as devotion, and lasting as immortal life! O Almighty Goodness, hear me! Be to her at all times, particularly in the hour of distress or trial, a Friend and Comforter, a Guide and Guard.

"How are Thy servants blest, O Lord,
How sure is their defence!
Eternal Wisdom is their guide,
Their help, Omnipotence!"

Forgive me, Clarinda, the injury I have done you! To-night I shall be with you; as indeed I shall be ill at ease till I see you.

SYLVANDER.

No. XIX.

Two o'clock.

I JUST now received your first letter of yesterday, by the careless negligence of the penny-post. Clarinda, matters are grown very serious with us; then seriously hear me, and hear me, Heaven—I met you, my dear * * * * *, by far the first of woman kind, at least to me; I esteemed, I loved you at first sight; the longer I am acquainted with you, the more innate amiableness and worth I discover in you. —You have suffered a loss, I confess, for my sake: but if the firmest, steadiest, warmest friendship; if every endeavour to be worthy of your friendship; if a love, strong as the ties of nature, and holy as the duties of religion—if all these can make any thing like a compensation for the evil I have occasioned you, if they be worth your acceptance, or can in the least add to your enjoyments—So help Sylvander, ye Powers above, in his hour of need, as he freely gives these all to Clarinda!

I esteem you, I love you as a friend; I admire you, I love you as a woman, beyond any one in all the circle of creation; I know I shall continue to esteem you, to love you, to pray for you, nay, to pray for myself for your sake.

Expect me at eight—And believe me to be ever, my dearest Madam, yours most entirely,

SYLVANDER.

No. XX.

February 14th, 1788.

WHEN matters, my love, are desperate, we must put on a desperate face—

> ——"On reason build resolve,
> That column of true majesty in man."

Or, as the same author finely says in another place—

> ——"Let thy soul spring up,
> And lay strong hold for help on him that made thee."

I am yours, Clarinda, for life. Never be discouraged at all this. Look forward; in a few weeks I shall be somewhere or other out of the possibility of seeing you: till then, I shall write you often, but visit you seldom. Your fame, your welfare, your happiness, are dearer to me than any gratification whatever. Be comforted, my love! the present moment is the worst: the lenient hand of Time is daily and hourly either lightening the burden, or making us insensible to the weight. None of these friends, I mean Mr ——— and the other gentleman, can hurt your worldly support, and for their friendship, in a little time you will learn to be easy, and, by and by, to be happy without it. A decent means of livelihood in the world, an approving God, a peaceful conscience, and one firm trusty friend—can any body that has these be said to be unhappy? These are yours.

To-morrow evening I shall be with you about eight; probably for the last time till I return to Edinburgh. In the meantime, should any of these two *unlucky* friends question you respecting me, whether I am *the man*, I do not think they are entitled to any information. As to their jealousy and spying, I despise them.—Adieu, my dearest Madam!

SYLVANDER.

No. XXI.

GLASGOW, *Monday Evening*, 9 *o'clock*, 17*th Feb.* 1788.

THE attraction of love, I find, is in an inverse proportion to the attraction of the Newtonian philosophy. In the system of Sir Isaac, the nearer objects are to one another, the stronger is the attractive force; in my system, every mile-stone that marked my progress from Clarinda, awakened a keener pang of attachment to her. How do you feel, my love? Is your heart ill at ease? I fear it.—God forbid that these persecutors should harass that peace, which is more precious to me than my own. Be assured I shall ever think of you, muse on you, and, in my moments of devotion, pray for you. The hour that you are not in all my thoughts—"be that hour darkness! let the shadows of death cover it! let it not be numbered in the hours of the day!"

——"When I forget the darling theme,
Be my tongue mute! my fancy paint no more!
And, dead to joy, forget my heart to beat!"

I have just met with my old friend, the ship captain; guess my pleasure—To meet you could alone have given me more. My brother William, too, the young saddler, has come to Glasgow to meet me; and here are we three spending the evening.

I arrived here too late to write by post; but I'll wrap half a dozen sheets of blank paper together, and send it by

the fly, under the name of a parcel. You shall hear from me next post town. I would write you a long letter, but for the present circumstance of my friend.

Adieu, my Clarinda! I am just going to propose your health by way of grace-drink.

SYLVANDER.

No. XXII.

CUMNOCK, 2*d March*, 1788.

I HOPE, and am certain, that my generous Clarinda* will not think my silence, for now a long week, has been in any degree owing to my forgetfulness. I have been tossed about through the country ever since I wrote you; and am here, returning from Dumfries-shire, at an inn, the post-office of the place, with just so long time as my horse eats his corn, to write you. I have been hurried with business and dissipation almost equal to the insidious decree of the Persian monarch's mandate, when he forbade asking petition of God or man for forty days. Had the venerable prophet been as throng as I, he had not broken the decree, at least not thrice a-day.

I am thinking my farming scheme will yet hold. A worthy intelligent farmer, my father's friend and my own, has been with me on the spot: he thinks the bargain practicable. I am myself, on a more serious review of the lands, much better pleased with them. I won't mention this in writing to any body but you and ———. Don't accuse me of being fickle: I have the two plans of life before me, and I wish to adopt the one most likely to procure me independence. I shall be in Edinburgh next week. I long to see you: your image is omnipresent to me; nay, I am convinced I would soon idolatrize it most seriously; so much do absence and memory improve the medium

* The letter about the 23d of February seems to be wanting.

through which one sees the much-loved object. To-night, at the sacred hour of eight, I expect to meet you—at the Throne of Grace. I hope, as I go home to-night, to find a letter from you at the post-office in Mauchline. I have just once seen that dear hand since I left Edinburgh—a letter indeed which much affected me. Tell me, first of womankind! will my warmest attachment, my sincerest friendship, my correspondence, will they be any compensation for the sacrifices you make for my sake! If they will, they are yours. If I settle on the farm I propose, I am just a day and a half's ride from Edinburgh. We will meet—don't you say, 'perhaps too often!'

Farewell, my fair, my charming Poetess! May all good things ever attend you! I am ever, my dearest Madam, yours,

SYLVANDER.

No. XXIII.

MOSSGIEL, *7th March*, 1788.

CLARINDA, I have been so stung with your reproach for unkindness, a sin so unlike me, a sin I detest more than a breach of the whole Decalogue, fifth, sixth, seventh, and ninth articles excepted, that I believe I shall not rest in my grave about it, if I die before I see you. You have often allowed me the head to judge, and the heart to feel, the influence of female excellence. Was it not blasphemy then, against your own charms, and against my feelings, to suppose that a short fortnight could abate my passion? You, my Love, may have your cares and anxieties to disturb you, but they are the usual recurrences of life; your future views are fixed, and your mind in a settled routine. Could not you, my ever dearest Madam, make a little allowance for a man, after long absence, paying a short visit to a country full of friends, relations, and early intimates?

Cannot you guess, my Clarinda, what thoughts, what cares, what anxious forebodings, hopes and fears, must crowd the breast of the man of keen sensibility, when no less is on the tapis than his aim, his employment, his very existence, through future life?

Now that, not my apology, but my defence, is made, I feel my soul respire more easily. I know you will go along with me in my justification—would to Heaven you could in my adoption too! I mean an adoption beneath the stars—an adoption where I might revel in the immediate beams of

"She, the bright sun of all her sex."

I would not have you, my dear Madam, so much hurt at Miss ———'s coldness. 'Tis placing yourself below her, an honour she by no means deserves. We ought, when we wish to be economists in happiness; we ought, in the first place, to fix the standard of our own character; and when, on full examination, we know where we stand, and how much ground we occupy, let us contend for it as property: and those who seem to doubt, or deny us what is justly ours, let us either pity their prejudices, or despise their judgment. I know, my dear, you will say this is self-conceit; but I call it self-knowledge. The one is the overweening opinion of a fool, who fancies himself to be what he wishes himself to be thought; the other is the honest justice that a man of sense, who has thoroughly examined the subject, owes to himself. Without this standard, this column in our own mind, we are perpetually at the mercy of the petulance, the mistakes, the prejudices, nay, the very weakness and wickedness of our fellow-creatures.

I urge this, my dear, both to confirm myself in the doctrine, which, I assure you, I sometimes need; and because I know that this causes you often much disquiet.—To return to Miss ———: she is most certainly a worthy soul, and equalled by very, very few, in goodness of heart. But can she boast more goodness of heart than Clarinda? Not

even prejudice will dare to say so. For penetration and discernment, Clarinda sees far beyond her: to wit, Miss ——— dare make no pretence; to Clarinda's wit, scarcely any of her sex dare make pretence. Personal charms, it would be ridiculous to run the parallel. And for conduct in life, Miss ——— was never called out, either much to do or to suffer; Clarinda has been both; and has performed her part, where Miss ——— would have sunk at the bare idea.

Away, then, with these disquietudes! Let us pray with the honest weaver of Kilbarchan— 'Lord, send us a gude conceit o' oursel!' Or, in the words of the auld sang,

'Who does me disdain, I can scorn them again,
And I'll never mind any such foes.'

There is an error in the commerce of intimacy * * * * * * * * * * * way of exchange, have not an equivalent to give us; and, what is still worse, have no idea of the value of our goods. Happy is our lot indeed, when we meet with an honest merchant, who is qualified to deal with us on our own terms; but that is a rarity. With almost every body we must pocket our pearls, less or more, and learn, in the old Scotch phrase—'To gie sic like as we get.' For this reason one should try to erect a kind of bank or store-house in one's own mind; or, as the Psalmist says, 'We should commune with our own hearts, and be still.' This is exactly * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

No. XXIV.*

I own myself guilty, Clarinda; I should have written you last week; but when you recollect, my dearest Madam,

* This letter must have been written after his short visit to Edinburgh, when he concluded the bargain with Mr Miller on the 13th March. He seems to have avoided seeing Clarinda on this occasion. Its date is probably about 18th March.

that yours of this night's post is only the third I have got from you, and that this is the fifth or sixth I have sent to you, you will not reproach me, with a good grace, for unkindness. I have always some kind of idea, not to sit down to write a letter, except I have time and possession of my faculties so as to do some justice to my letter; which at present is rarely my situation. For instance, yesterday I dined at a friend's at some distance; the savage hospitality of this country spent me the most part of the night over the nauseous potion in the bowl: this day—sick—head-ache—low spirits—miserable—fasting, except for a draught of water or small beer: now eight o'clock at night—only able to crawl ten minutes walk into M—— to wait the post, in the pleasurable hope of hearing from the mistress of my soul.

But, truce with all this! When I sit down to write to you, all is harmony and peace. A hundred times a-day do I figure you, before your taper, your book, or work laid aside, as I get within the room. How happy have I been! and how little of that scantling portion of time, called the life of man, is sacred to happiness!

I could moralize to-night like a death's head.

> 'O what is life, that thoughtless wish of all!
> A drop of honey in a draught of gall.'

Nothing astonishes me more, when a little sickness clogs the wheels of life, than the thoughtless career we run in the hour of health. 'None saith, where is God, my Maker, that giveth songs in the night; who teacheth us more knowledge than the beasts of the field, and more understanding than the fowls of the air.'

Give me, my Maker, to remember thee! Give me to act up to the dignity of my nature! Give me to feel "another's wo;" and continue with me that dear-lov'd friend that feels with mine!

The dignified and dignifying consciousness of an honest

man, and the well-grounded trust in approving Heaven, are two most substantial * * * of happiness.

* * * * * * *

SYLVANDER.

No. XXV.*

BEFORE you ask me why I have not written you, first let me be informed of you *how* I shall write you? "In friendship," you say; and I have many a time taken up my pen to try an epistle of "Friendship" to you; but it will not do: 'tis like Jove grasping a pop-gun, after having wielded his thunder. When I take up the pen, recollection ruins me. Ah! my ever dearest Clarinda! Clarinda!—what an host of memory's tenderest offspring crowd on my fancy at that sound! But I must not indulge that subject—you have forbid it.

I am extremely happy to learn, that your precious health is re-established, and that you are once more fit to enjoy that satisfaction in existence, which health alone can give us. My old friend has indeed been kind to you. Tell him, that I envy him the power of serving you. I had a letter from him a while ago, but it was so dry, so distant, so like a card to one of his clients, that I could scarcely bear to read it, and have not yet answered it. He is a good honest fellow; and *can* write a friendly letter, which would do equal honour to his head and his heart; as a whole sheaf of his letters I have by me will witness: and though Fame does not blow her trumpet at my approach *now*, as she did *then*, when he first honoured me with his friendship, yet I am as proud as ever; and when I am laid in my grave, I wish to be stretched at my full length, that I may occupy every inch of ground which I have a right to.

You would laugh were you to see me where I am just

* This letter was written after the Poet's marriage.

now!—would to heaven you were here to laugh with me! though I am afraid that crying would be our first employment. Here am I set, a solitary hermit, in the solitary room of a solitary inn, with a solitary bottle of wine by me —as grave and as stupid as an owl—but, like that owl, still faithful to my old song. In confirmation of which, my dear Mrs Mack, here is your good health! may the hand-waled benisons o' heaven bless your bonnie face; and the wratch wha skellies at your weelfare, may the auld tinkler deil get him to clout his rotten heart! Amen.

You must know, my dearest Madam, that these now many years, wherever I am, in whatever company, when a married lady is called on as a toast, I constantly give you; but as your name has never passed my lips, even to my most intimate friend, I give you by the name of Mrs Mack. This is so well known among my acquaintances, that when my married lady is called for, the toast-master will say—"O, we need not ask him who it is—here's Mrs Mack!" I have also, among my convivial friends, set on foot a round of toasts, which I call a round of Arcadian Shepherdesses; that is, a round of favourite ladies, under female names celebrated in ancient song; and then, you are my Clarinda. So, my lovely Clarinda, I devote this glass of wine to a most ardent wish for your happiness!

In vain would Prudence, with decorous sneer,
Point out a cens'ring world, and bid me fear:
Above that world on wings of love I rise,
I know its worst, and can that worst despise.
"Wrong'd, injur'd, shunn'd, unpitied, unredrest,
The mock'd quotation of the scorner's jest,"
Let Prudence' direst bodements on me fall,
Clarinda, rich reward! o'erpays them all!

I have been rhyming a little of late, but I do not know if they are worth postage.—Tell me * * * * * * * *

SYLVANDER.